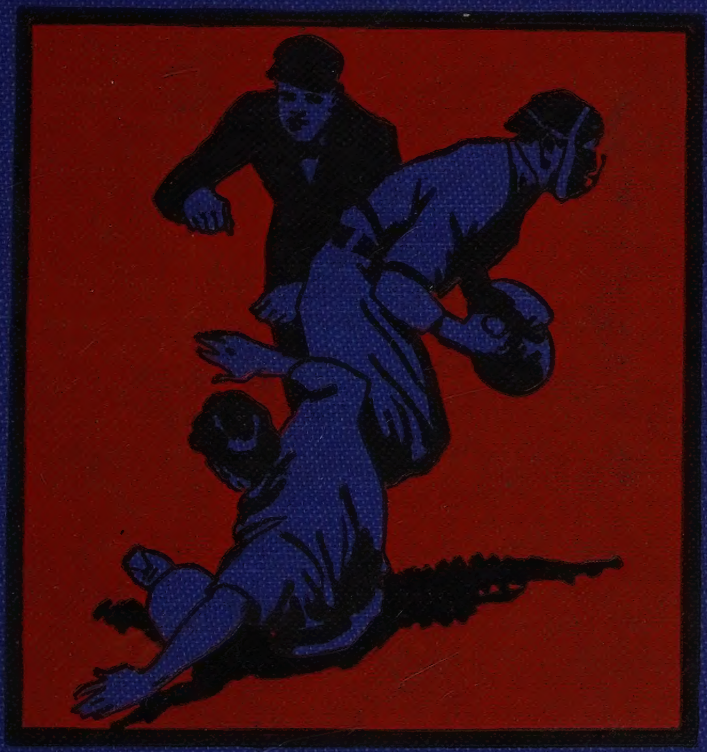
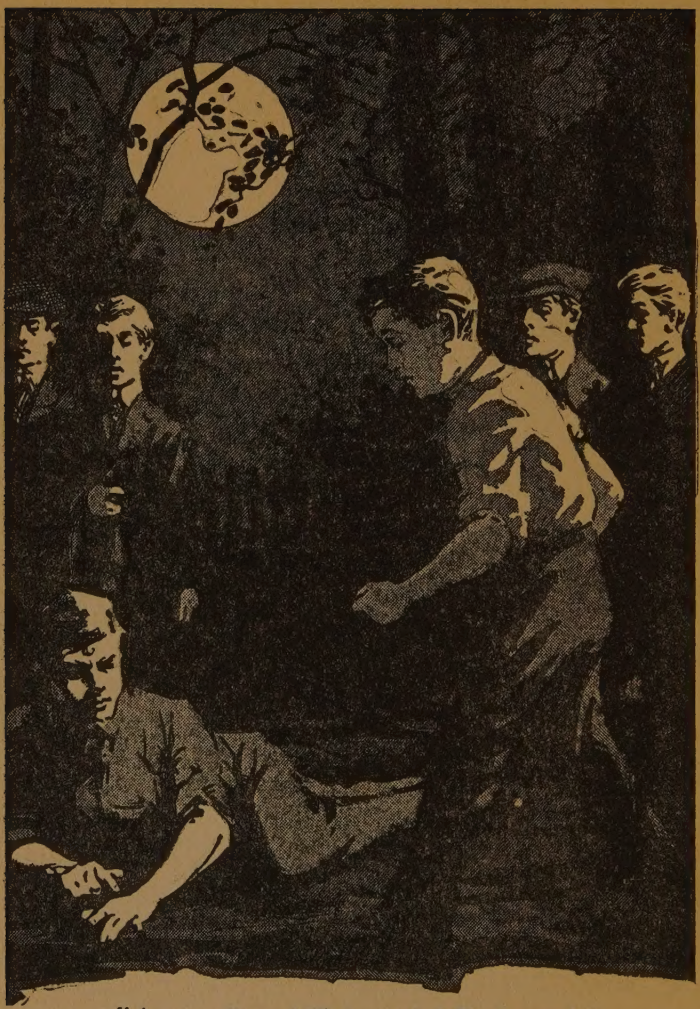
The CHUMS of SCRANTON HIGH



Donald Ferguson



"Are you through?" demanded Hugh sternly

THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH

OR

Hugh Morgan's Uphill Fight

BY
DONALD FERGUSON

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THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH

CHAPTER I

A FENCE WITH A HISTORY

"The best day so far this spring, fellows!"

"It feels mighty much like baseball weather, for a fact, Otto!"

"True for you, K. K., though there's still just a little tang to this April air."

"What of that, Eli? The big leagues have opened shop all over the land, and the city papers are already full of baseball scores, and diamond lore. We ought to be getting busy ourselves in little old Scranton."

"Allandale High is practicing. Sandy Dowd and I saw a bunch of the boys out on their field after school yesterday, didn't we, Sandy?"

"That's right, we did. And I understand Belleville expects to put an extra hard-hitting nine in the game this season. They're still sore over the terrible drubbing Allandale gave them last summer."

"Since Scranton has now become a member of the Three-Town League, taking the place of Lawrence when that nine dropped out, seems to me we ought to lose no time if we expect to commence

practicing. That same Allandale team swept the circuit, you remember, like a hurricane."

"We've plenty of good material, fellows, believe me, right here in Scranton High. And somehow I've got a hunch that we're going to make even mighty Allandale take a tumble before the season gets old."

"Don't boast too soon, Eli Griffin. That's a wee Yankee trick you must have inherited from your forebears."

"Easy for you to say that, Andy McGuffey. Why, you're a regular old pessimist, like all your canny Scotch ancestors were. You love to look at the world through smoked glasses. On my part, I prefer to use rose-colored ones, and expect the best sort of things to happen, even if I do get fooled lots of times."

A number of well-grown lads were perched in all sorts of grotesque attitudes along the top rail of the campus fence. That same fence of Scranton High was almost as famous, in its modest way, as the one at Yale known throughout the length and breadth of the whole land.

It had stood there, repaired at stated and frequent intervals, for at least two score of years. Hundreds upon hundreds of Scranton lads, long since grown to manhood, and many of them gone forth to take their appointed places in the busy marts of the world, kept a warm corner in their hearts for sacred memories of that dear old fence.

Many a glorious campaign of sport or mischief

had been talked over by a line of students perched along the flat rail at the summit of that same fence. More than one contemplated school mutiny had been hatched in excited whispers amidst those never-to-be-forgotten historic surroundings.

Why, when a few years back the unthinking and officious School Directors voted to have that fence demolished, simply because it seemed to be out of keeping with the grand new building that had been erected, a storm of angry protest arose from students and parents; while letters arrived from a score and more of eminent men who were proud to call Scranton their birthplace. So overwhelming was the flood, that a hurry call for an extra meeting of the Board went out, at which their former ill-advised decision was rescinded.

And so there that fence remained, beloved of every boy in Scranton, the younger fry only longing for the day to come when passing for the high school they, too, might have the proud privilege of "roosting" on its well-worn rails. Possibly it will still be in existence when some of their sons also reach the dignity of wearing the freshman class colors, and of battling on gridiron and diamond for the honor of Old Scranton.

As to the identity of the boys in question, from whom those remarks proceeded, they might just as well be briefly introduced here as later, as all of them are destined to take part in the lively doings that will be recorded in this and in other volumes of this series.

Otto was Otto Brand; Eli Griffin came of New England parentage, and had some of the traits that distinguish Yankees the world over, though a pretty fine fellow, all told; Andy McGuffey, as his name would indicate, could look back to a Scotch ancestry, and occasionally a touch of the brogue might be detected in his speech; Sandy Dowd had red hair, blue eyes and a host of very noticeable freckles; but could be good-natured in spite of any drawbacks; while the lad called "K. K." was in reality Kenneth Kinkaid; but since boys generally have little use for a name that makes a mouthful, he was known far and wide under that singularly abbreviated cognomen.

The Committee on Sports connected with Scranton High was a body of seniors appointed by the students themselves, and given authority to handle all questions connected with athletics. As a rule, they carried out their duties in a broad-minded fashion, and not only merited the confidence of the entire school but also the respect of the faculty as well.

There was considerable anxiety abroad just at present, because it was well known that the committee had been discussing the possible make-up of the baseball team to which would be given the proud privilege of representing the school that season in the Three-Town League. No one knew absolutely just who would be selected among the numerous candidates, though, of course, it was only natural that many entertained

wild hopes, which were only doomed to disappointment.

Two more boys came sauntering along, and found places on the "roost." One of these was a burly fellow with a pugnacious face and a bold eye. He seemed to be no favorite among the boys, though they treated him with a certain amount of respect. Well, there is never a town or a village but has its particular bully; and for several years now Nick Lang had ably filled that rôle in Scranton.

He was a born "scrapper," and never so happy as when annoying others. A fight appeared to be the acme of pleasure with him, and it was seldom that he could be seen without some trace of a mix-up on his face in the shape of scratches, or a suspicious hue about one of his eyes.

The other boy was Leon Disney, the "understudy" of Nick. While just as tough as the other, Leon never displayed the same amount of boldness. He would rather attain his revenge through some petty means, being a born sneak. The boys only tolerated Leon because Nick chose to stand up for him; and every one disliked to anger the Lang fellow, on account of his way of making things unpleasant for others.

The general talk continued, with Nick taking part in it, for he at least was known to be a smart hand at athletics, and had often led in such things as hammer-throwing and wrestling.

During the course of the conversation, which

had become general, Eli chanced to mention the name of Owen Dugdale.

"Why, they say that even he aspires to get a place on the substitute list, just to think of his nerve. Perhaps a few other fellows might feel they'd been slighted if the committee turned them down for Owen Dugdale."

"Hold up there a bit, Eli," said K. K., reprovingly. "If I were you I'd go a little slow about running a fellow down, just because he happens to be called Owen Dugdale, and live with a queer old gentleman he calls his grandfather, but who chooses to keep aloof from Scranton folks as if he were a hermit. I happen to know that two of our most respected chums, Hugh Morgan and Thad Stevens, seem to have taken a great liking for that dark-faced chap. I've seen Owen in their company considerably of late."

Eli gave a snort of disdain. He was one of those impulsive boys who often say disagreeable things on the spur of the moment, and then perhaps afterwards feel sorry for having done so. Evidently, he had taken a notion to dislike the said Owen, and did not care who knew it.

"That fellow had been a mystery ever since he and his ancient granddaddy came to Scranton, and started to live in that old house called The Rookery, and which used to be thought a haunted place. I've always had a hunch they must be some relation to the notorious Luther Dugdale who has had a bad reputation as a dishonest operator

down in the Wall Street district in New York. Why, lately I even asked my cousin in a letter about that man, and he wrote me the old chap had strangely disappeared some years ago, carrying off a big bunch of boodle dishonestly gained. Well, I'm not saying it's the same old rascal who's living in our midst right now, but, fellows, you can draw your own conclusions, for they came here just two years ago this summer!"

"Wow! that's something new you're telling us, Eli!"

"It takes *you* to pick up clues, and you'll miss your vocation if you don't look for a job with the Government Secret Service, believe me, Eli!"

"So Hugh Morgan has taken up with that gloomy looking chap Owen, has he?" remarked Nick Lang, with a suggestive wink at his crony, Leon. "Mebbe, now, I might badger him into having a friendly little bout with fists through that kid. As the rest of you happen to know I've tried about every other way to make the coward fight, and he only gives me one of his smiles, and says he's opposed to scrapping. That wise mother of his has tied little Hughy to her apron strings, seems like; but I'll get him yet, see if I don't."

The other fellows exchanged significant looks and nods. Hugh Morgan had apparently always been more or less of an enigma to them. They knew he was no coward, for only the last winter he had leaped boldly into the river at the risk of his own life, and saved little Tommy Crabbe just

when the unfortunate child was about to be drawn by the fierce current under the ice. Still, no one had even known Hugh to be engaged in a fight. There was some deep object back of his reluctance so to demean himself, most of the fellows believed, and as he was so well liked, they respected his motives.

Just then keen-eyed Andy McGuffey was heard to cry out:

"Speak of an angel and you'll hear the rustle of his wings, and there comes our Hugh right now. See, he's waving his hand to us, and is hurrying along at almost a run. Say, it may be he's fetching some news from the committee, because he told me he had an idea they'd reach an understanding this afternoon. Yes, he's looking mighty wise, so I reckon we're going to hear something drop."

CHAPTER II

THE BOYS OF OLD SCRANTON

The boy advancing toward the comrades perched on the campus fence was bright of face, and with laughing eyes that made him hosts of friends. Few had ever seen Hugh Morgan angry, though there was a report that on a certain occasion he had stopped to give old Garry Owen the truckman a piece of his mind, and threaten to have him arrested if he was ever seen beating his poor horse when the animal was stalled with a load too heavy for his strength. Yes, and although Garry was known to have a fiery Irish tongue, he had been subdued by the arguments which Hugh hurled at him, and meekly promised to go easy with his stinging whip after that.

Hugh seemed to be a trimly built lad, who evidently believed in keeping not only his mind but his body also well trained, since so much depended on good health. He lived with his mother and smaller sister. His father had been dead some years now, but apparently the widow had plenty of means to afford them a good living. They resided in a nice house and kept one servant.

Most of the boys of Scranton High thought Hugh a fine fellow, and envied Thad Stevens the privilege of being his closest chum. A few, how-

ever, had no use for Hugh, and among them were such fellows as Nick Lang and Leon Disney. They pretended to dislike him because he had no "nerve," which was only another method of saying that he absolutely declined to be egged into a dispute, and had a wonderful way of cooling off all would-be fighters who dared him to a fist test.

Those who knew Hugh best felt certain there must be some good and valid reason for his action in this respect. He had taken none of them into his confidence, however, and they could only surmise what it might be. The general consensus of opinion was that possibly at some time in his younger years, Hugh may have shown signs of an ungovernable temper, and his wise mother had made him solemnly promise never to allow himself to be drawn into a fight unless it was to protect some one weaker than himself who was being rudely treated by a bully.

He nodded his head as he drew near the group, for by now the eager boys had left their lofty perch, and gathered in an excited bunch to learn what was in the wind.

"News, fellows!" exclaimed the latest addition to the group, "great news for the Scranton lovers of baseball!"

"Then the committee have finished making out their programme, and mebbe even decided on the lucky candidates who'll have a chance to show what they've got in them to put the school on the map this year?"

"A pretty good guess for you, Eli, so go up head," laughed Hugh; "for I've just been told that is what has come about. Their deliberations have closed, and presently there will be a general call issued for a full meeting, at which their report is to be read. Then everybody will know whether or not they have been deemed worthy of making a try for honors in the diamond this season."

"We'll all be mighty glad when it's over, and those of us who are unfortunate enough to get left high and dry can know the worst," said K. K.

"Huh! you needn't lose any sleep over that, K. K.!" exclaimed Sandy Dowd. "Everybody knows you're a jim-dandy at the bat, and a clever fielder in the bargain. Wish I had as much chance as you and Hugh here of making the nine. But then we must put faith in our committee, and believe they'll select the ones they firmly believe are best fitted for the job of holding down those heavy sluggers of Allandale. The rest of us can root for the glory of old Scranton, and even that counts."

"But the committee, it seems, have gone even further," continued Hugh, looking around at the eager faces of his chums, and also some who could hardly be classed under that head.

"Go on and tell us the news, Hugh! Don't ye see we're just dying to know?" pleaded Andy McGuffey.

"Have they been in touch with Allandale and Belleville?" asked the sagacious Eli.

"It seems that last night they went over to Allandale to meet the committee of that place, as well as the one representing Belleville," continued Hugh. "Matters of every kind were taken up and discussed. The meeting ended with a programme being laid out that is to be rigidly adhered to. Two weeks from tomorrow, Saturday, we will find ourselves up against Belleville; and on the following Saturday it's to be Allandale. Those two clubs have found a way of having their meetings come off on Wednesday afternoons at three, a special favor granted by the directors of the respective schools on account of there being but three clubs in the league."

"Two weeks, and as yet we don't even know who's going to be on our team!" burst out Eli. "Seems to me that's an awful short time to get settled down into our best stride. Allandale will have a terrible bulge on us, Hugh, because I hear they've kept almost the same team that carried off the honors last year."

"If anything it's said to be some stronger," added Sandy Dowd, ponderously, for he had a habit of looking solemn at times, in spite of his blue eyes, red hair and mottled face. "An Allandale fellow told me they expected to wipe up the earth with both Belleville and Scranton this term."

"Huh! better spell able first," grunted Eli. "I hope there's no more delay than is necessary about notifying the candidates who've been se-

lected to appear on the athletic field after school every day, and keep hustling till supper time. We've just *got* to make the sand fly, if we expect to catch up with those older teams."

"Well," Hugh assured him, "you'll know all about it by tomorrow night, because the last knot will have been untied by then, and everybody notified to come out to the meeting. Then beginning on next Monday afternoon, hard practice for the lucky ones, to be continued every decent day during the week, with a game against a picked nine on Saturday."

"Will Mr. Leonard coach the team as he promised, Hugh?" asked K. K.

Mr. Leonard was the assistant of the head of the Scranton schools, a pretty fine sort of a young man, who had gained quite some fame as an athlete while at Princeton, and was well fitted for the task of athletic instructor, which post he filled in addition to other duties.

"He told me he would take the greatest pleasure in trying to build up a winning team for Scranton," Hugh informed them.

"Good for Mr. Leonard, he's a dandy!" exclaimed Eli; and that seemed to be the consensus of opinion; though Nick was seen to allow his upper lip to curl a bit at mention of the athletic instructor's name.

There was a reason back of that, as the other boys well knew, for they remembered the time when Nick had been handled pretty briskly by Mr.

Leonard, and made to apologize for some rude remark he had thrown out heedlessly in his rough way. It could hardly be expected that Nick would ever have a very good opinion of the young man who had humbled his swollen pride in the presence of the same fellows whom he had so long ridden rough-shod over.

"Well, the afternoon is getting on, and supper-time will be around before long; so, for one, I'm going to head for home," observed K. K.

There was a general exodus, and the famous fence was soon abandoned by the entire group of boys. They started off by twos and threes, with the general drift of conversation circling around the one great subject—the meeting to be called for Saturday night in the school, at which the report of the committee would be made, together with an announcement as to their choice as to candidates to be tried out for the various positions on the season's team.

Hugh and K. K. walked along in company. Hugh always fancied the Kinkaid boy, for there was something dependable about him that won the confidence of almost all his mates. K. K. was one of the most remarkable chaps, who, while engaging in the customary rough and tumble sports of boys with red blood in their veins, still seemed able to keep himself always tidy and neat. No one ever knew how he did it, and a few were wont to call him a "sissy," but K. K. was far from that. Only one boy attending Scranton High could

really come under such a name, and he was Reggie Van Alstyne, who had always been a veritable dude.

"Oh! I had nearly forgotten an errand my mother commissioned me to do for her," Hugh suddenly exclaimed. "I'll have to leave you here, K. K., and turn back."

The other laughed.

"Too much baseball on the brain, I reckon, Hugh," he went on to say; "but then, with your fetching us that good news, it wasn't to be wondered that you let such a little thing as an errand for your mother slip out of your mind. If I can help any, tell me, Hugh."

"Oh! no, I've just got to step in at Madame Pangborn's and ask her something. My mother is interested in Red Cross work, you know, and the old Madame has a connection with the French branch of that service. Most of the material the ladies of Scranton have been getting ready is sent abroad through the queer old lady, who, they say, once used to queen it at the court of Louis Napoleon. She's over eighty years of age now, but quite rich, I've been told. And if you've never been in her house you'd be interested in seeing how she lives. That wonderful green parrot of hers can rattle off a whole string of songs and sayings. It almost gives you the creeps to hear Jocko performing, for it strikes you as what Andy McGuffey would call uncanny. Well, so long, K. K. I hope you make the team, all right."

"Same to you, Hugh; but nobody doubts that, for we all think you're away above all the rest of the Scranton boys as an all-round athlete, barring none. Some may be able to outdo you in their specialty, but they're weak in other stunts."

So they parted, K. K. continuing on his way home, while Hugh turned into a side street, and went whistling along after the manner of a boy whose mind knew no care. Presently he came to a large house. It was rather dingy on the outside, but Hugh, who had often been indoors, knew there was some elegant old mahogany furniture, as well as other mementoes of the former life of the Madame when she filled a high niche at the French court, before the republic was inaugurated.

His knock at the door—for instead of an electric bell the lady insisted on using one of those enormous old silver-plated knockers, that used to be the fashion fifty or sixty years back—was answered by a colored woman, who seemed to know the boy, for she smiled pleasantly.

"Yassir, de missus is in," she told him in answer to his question. "Jes' yo' walk on back to de library, honey, an' dar you'll find her, sewin' like she always does dese amazin' times. You knows de way, I reckons, sah."

"I certainly do, Sarah," he assured her as he started along the wide hall.

When he knocked gently at the library door, he was told to enter, which Hugh proceeded to do. A very wrinkled and old woman sat in a big chair.

The table was covered with material for all sorts of bandages, and such things as are urgently needed wherever hideous war is raging. Hugh noticed that at sight of him Madame Pangborn seemed pleased. He wondered why, but was not long in learning.

"Oh! I am glad you've dropped in to see me, Hugh," she told him; "because something very strange has happened, and perhaps you might be able to advise me. In fact, Hugh, I fear I am being systematically robbed!"

CHAPTER III

HUGH SHOULDERS A HEAVY TASK

Hugh hardly knew how to take that astonishing declaration on the part of the old lady. He remembered that she was very peculiar in some ways, and the very first thought that flashed into the boy's mind was to the effect that Madame Pangborn might be getting what some fellows would, impolitely of course, have called "daffy."

Still her black eyes flashed with all their old-time vigor, and she appeared to be very much in earnest. More to humor her than anything else Hugh remarked in a sympathetic voice:

"I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am. Of course if I can do anything for you I'll be only too glad of the chance. Would you mind telling me about it?"

"Thank you for your kindness, my son," she went on, eagerly. "You see, a woman of my age, who has studied human nature for a long time, comes to know the weaknesses of boys, even while believing in them to the utmost. At times the temptation may be more than their powers of resistance can stand, and they are irresistibly impelled to take something that excites their cupidity. I am prone to believe most of them find it possible to resist such an inclination. Still, alas! I have known of occasions where the temptation carried the day. This seems to be one of them.

My heart is feeling very sore over it, too. I thought at first to speak to Chief Wambold, but somehow I hesitated. And then it happened precisely as before."

"Do you mean to say you have missed something on two separate occasions, ma'am?" Hugh hastened to ask, beginning to realize now that "where there was smoke there must be a fire," and that after all there was something more in this affair than a mere specter brought into being through an old lady's whim.

"Yes, it has occurred twice, and on each occasion that same boy chanced to be in my house. Oh! it is too bad, too bad! And he such a quiet and respectful young chap in the bargain."

"Please tell me more about it, for I can't possibly be of any assistance to you, Mrs. Pangborn, unless I know the facts," Hugh continued, his curiosity beginning to rise by jumps.

"The first time," the old lady went on to say, consulting what seemed to be a diary which she picked up from her overloaded table, "was just a week ago today. I had been busy as usual, for an additional number of pieces came in from those kind ladies of Scranton who are helping me sew for the brave wounded poilus of my country, valiant France. This lad brought in a package which Mrs. Ackerman had given into his charge. I remember I chatted with him quite a while, and was interested in all he said so respectfully; for it happened I had heard a number of peculiar things

in the way of town gossip concerning him and his aged grandfather."

She paused as if to recover her breath. Hugh, on his part, had started as though he might have received a sudden shock. Possibly his thoughts flew instantly toward one particular boy who happened to have an old grandfather, and about whom there had always been more or less mysterious comment in the town.

"After he had gone away, letting himself out at my request, so as to save Sarah from coming up from the kitchen, I had occasion to pass into the other room, which also opens into the front hall. Something impelled me to idly count over some souvenir spoons that I have personally collected from various parts of the world, and each one of which has a peculiar value for me far, far beyond its pecuniary worth.

"To my surprise and dismay I found that there were only eleven, when there should have been twelve. I keep them there on a table so as to show them to some of my kind lady friends, for I am particularly proud of my collection, and Sarah had only that morning brightened them all superbly until they glistened.

"So I called her up and asked her if she could remember counting the spoons at the time she cleaned them. She assured me solemnly that the entire twelve were in the open case when she placed them on the table at my orders.

"It remained a puzzle to me for a whole week.

I believed, of course, that Sarah must have unconsciously mislaid a spoon, which would be found sooner or later. At the same time I remembered the visit of that lad, who had never been in my house before, and how he might have glanced into the drawing-room through accident, and seeing my souvenir spoons, been tempted to purloin one. But every time that terrible thought flashed into my mind I indignantly refused to harbor it, I love all boys so much.

"Then again today he came with more work turned in by Mrs. Ackerman, who had for some reason of her own selected him as her messenger. I actually forgot all my ugly suspicions in the charm of his manly conversation, until some time after he had gone, again, at my suggestion, letting himself out. I hurried into the drawing-room, and with trembling fingers proceeded to count my spoons. There were but ten of them left in the open box. Another had strangely vanished!"

Hugh almost gasped, he was so tremendously interested in this thrilling recital.

"You are certain you did not make any mistake, Mrs. Pangborn?" he asked, for want of something better to say.

"Please step into the other room and count them for yourself, Hugh," she quickly told him. "You can use the connecting door if you wish, instead of passing around by way of the hall."

Hugh came back a minute later. His face was very grave.

"It is just as you told me, ma'am," he remarked, softly, at the same time shaking his head, as though he could not bring himself to believe it was as bad as the old lady suspected; that there must be some other and reasonable explanation for the vanishing of the spoons; surely Owen Dugdale could not be guilty of such a base theft!

"What can I believe, Hugh?" she almost wailed. "I do not walk in my sleep, and that colored girl is as honest as your own mother, I feel positive. Please tell me you will try and find out the answer to this distressing puzzle."

"I can easily promise you that I will at least do my level best to learn where your property went, Mrs. Pangborn; and if possible recover it for you," he hastened to assure her.

"Thank you very much, my son. As soon as I saw you I seemed to feel an inspiration that Providence had sent you to me in my distress. For it would break my heart if I were compelled to have that poor, weak boy arrested, and charged with so grievous a breach of the law. You being a boy may be able to have a certain amount of influence over him. You may even induce him to own up to his act, and send me back my precious spoons. The ones taken by some accident are the very ones I value most."

"While I give you my promise willingly enough, ma'am," Hugh went on to say deliberately, "I want to add that I can't believe it possible Owen Dugdale could be so small and mean as to yield to an

impulse, and take anything that belonged to another."

"That is splendid of you, Hugh!" she cried, her black eyes sparkling with genuine admiration. "I love a boy who has faith in his fellows, and thinks the best of them, no matter how circumstantial evidence may seem to blacken their characters. And my son, if only you can find an explanation of this puzzle that will exonerate your young companion, I shall be very happy indeed. A great load will have been removed from my poor old heart. I would rather lose the entire twelve spoons than learn that Owen Dugdale were guilty."

"Then you will not say a word of this to any one," he continued, "particularly Chief Wambold, who everybody knows has a great itching to shine as a wonderful sleuth, but makes himself only ridiculous whenever he tries to unearth any uncommon happening?"

"I gladly give you my promise to keep silent, Hugh," she assured him, holding out her withered hand, resplendant with lovely gems, diamonds, rubies and pearls, for like most French women, the Madame was more than commonly fond of jewelry. "And from what you say, as well as your mentioning the boy's name before I spoke it, I assume that you know Owen Dugdale?"

"I have latterly become greatly interested in him, ma'am, and we have been much together," he told her simply. "Since I pride myself on be-

ing something of a reader of human nature, I feel almost certain that there must be a great mistake somewhere; and that when the truth is discovered, you and I will laugh, and say it was ridiculous for us to even think Owen could have taken the spoons!"

The old lady's eyes glistened as she heard these brave words. Standing up for a friend was one of Hugh Morgan's leading traits; and yet, if the truth were known, he did not feel *quite* so positive as his words would indicate. Things certainly looked dark for the Dugdale boy. Hugh, when he came to think over the whole matter, was bound to be smitten with a grave fear lest the worst come to pass.

"Somehow I seem to have unbounded confidence in your ability to accomplish the impossible, Hugh Morgan," she told him, which words of praise thrilled him to the heart, for he was, after all, human and a boy. "Only good words have come to me about you from all those with whom I converse; for though you may think it odd in an old woman who never had a son of her own, I have all my life been interested in other people's children, particularly boys, seven of whom I have had educated at my expense. Ah! they are either fighting bravely for the life of France just now, or else filling patriots' graves in the battle country."

Hugh asked a few more questions that chanced to occur to him. Then he prepared to take his leave.

"I will think it all over, ma'am," he remarked, as she gave him her dainty if wrinkled hand to press, "and like as not I'll conjure up some scheme by which we can prove whether Owen is innocent or guilty. You see I could be hidden in that room and a trap set, you sending him word to call for a package you wished him to deliver. Then if he went out without even looking into the drawing-room, and yet another of your spoons disappeared, we'd know to a certainty that the trouble lay inside this house."

"Hugh, you give me fresh hope!" she cried, with her eyes glistening as though the tears were trying to flow. "Oh! I would almost pray that something of the sort turned out to be the case, for somehow I have taken a great interest in Owen Dugdale. I mean later on to find an opportunity to meet that wonderful grandfather of his, for somehow I suspect he may turn out to be an exile of note who has taken this means for hiding his identity. I have known eminent Russians to do that from fear of the Czar's secret agents."

Hugh could not but remember how some of the people chose to believe old Mr. Dugdale was keeping in hiding from some far less honorable cause; but of course he did not say anything about that. He went out of Madame Pangborn's big house with a sense of having undertaken a great responsibility; and realizing that an up-hill task lay upon his young shoulders which might test his utmost abilities to carry through.

CHAPTER IV

IN FOR A FROLIC

The high-school boys and girls of Scranton, like those of most other communities, delighted in getting up occasional entertainments so dear to the hearts of young people. A straw-ride late in the summer; it might be a class-spread under difficult conditions on account of the envy of the other grades at school; and once in a while a jolly barn dance was engineered by a committee composed of both sexes.

There was just such a pleasant outing arranged for this same Friday night. Some of the fellows had made up a party to go out several miles to where a big barn, as yet empty of the anticipated crop of hay, offered them excellent facilities for a merry hop.

A trio of darky players had been engaged. The leader was quite famous through that section of country and had played at such affairs for years. Everybody for miles around knew Daddy Whitehead and the fiddle from which he could extract the most enticing music boys and girls had ever danced to; while his assistants, Mose Coffin and Abe Skinner were fairly good with the violoncello and oboe, making a good combination capable of playing up-to-date dances, as well as others known

to the fathers and mothers of the present generation.

These affairs were conducted with a due respect to the proprieties. A middle-aged lady invariably went along in the carryall to chaperone the young people, although there was a deal of fun going and coming back home, as well as on the floor of the great barn, with its many lanterns to serve in lieu of electric lights.

Hugh was going, of course. He and his best chum, Thad Stevens, had a pretty fair car in which to transport the two girls whom they had invited as their partners. These same girls were co-eds with Hugh and Thad on the weekly paper which Scranton High issued, just as many other schools do. They were named Sue Barnes and Ivy Middleton. Sue was Hugh's company, while the dark-haired vivacious Ivy seemed to have a particular attraction for Thad.

By the way, since Thad has thus far not been introduced to the reader, it might be a good idea to say a few words about him before going any further with the exciting events that happened on the Friday night of the barn hop.

Thad was a quick-tempered lad, in which respect he seemed to differ radically from Hugh, who somehow managed to keep his under wonderful control, as though he had long practiced holding it in subjection. Strangely enough, Thad's folks came of Quaker stock, and "thee" and "thou" had been familiar words to his young ears. But Thad

apparently had not inherited the peaceful ways of his ancestors, for he had been in more than a few battles with some of his more pugnacious school companions, nor did he always come out from these encounters first best.

All the same, Thad was a pretty clever chap, and Hugh had always been very fond of his chum. They got on wonderfully well together, and seldom had the least "tiff."

It was Thad who had secured his father's old car for the special occasion. He turned up at Hugh's house about half-past seven that evening. It was a calm night, and the moon was just rising in the east, being a little past her full period.

"Say, this couldn't be improved on any, according to my notion, Thad," Hugh remarked, as, attracted by the call of the klaxon outside, he hurried forth, wearing his overcoat, for the night air was quite chilly, it being still only April.

"A bang-up night for a dance," echoed the enthusiastic Thad; "just cool enough to keep us from getting overheated. The farmer's wife will make the coffee, and spread a table for us in her big kitchen, she promised; and the girls are to provide lots of good things. We're mighty lucky for once, Hugh."

"How many do you think will be on hand?" asked the other, settling down alongside the driver.

"Well, ten couple have solemnly promised to attend, barring some accident; and I reckon there

may be several more show up, because we've done lots of talking about the jolly time we expected to have. I only hope that Nick Lang and his crowd will have the decency to stay away. If they show up there's bound to be trouble brewing."

"I'm afraid so," acceded Hugh, seriously, "for Nick is never so happy as when he's making other folks miserable. But the farmer has a stout hired man, who will be on deck to keep an eye on our cars, and other conveyances; so there'll hardly be any tricks attempted with the lines, taking wheels off buggies, and all such practical jokes, such as those fellows dearly love to play."

"I heard Owen Dugdale was coming," Thad went on to say, as they started off, "which is something unusual for him, because up to now we've never seen him at a hop."

"Now how did you learn that?" laughed Hugh.

"Oh! a little bird told me," replied the other. "Fact is, Hugh, pretty Peggy Noland told my sister Grace Owen had asked her to be his company to this hop, and she had accepted, because somehow she always liked Owen."

"Whew! I wonder now how Nick Lang will feel about that?" ventured Hugh. "You know Peggy used to have him for her company a number of times. But I remember how annoyed she looked at the class spread when he acted so rudely, and made everybody present wish he had stayed at home."

"Oh! Peggy says she will never, never go any-

where again with that terrible Nick Lang. She never did like him any too well, and now she detests him. I only hope Nick isn't mean enough to try to pick on Owen because Peggy 's accepted his offer to take her to the barn hop."

There were so many other things pressing on Hugh's mind just then that he did not give the matter much attention. Later on, perhaps he might have it brought forcibly before him, and in a manner bordering on tragedy in the bargain.

Hugh meant to take Thad into his confidence at the first favorable opportunity. He knew his chum would never breathe a syllable of what he told him; and possibly two heads might prove better than one in solving what promised to be a great enigma. But the time was too short now to even mention the matter. Perhaps later on as they chanced to come together between the dances he would find the opening he sought to confide in Thad. He did excite the other's curiosity, however, by saying just before they drew up in front of the Barnes' home:

"I've got something queer to tell you, Thad, when I get the chance. Perhaps it'll come while we're resting between dances. I've undertaken a pretty big proposition, and I'd like to have you share it with me."

"Well, now, you *have* got me guessing," chuckled Thad. "What a fellow you are for undertaking big things. Nothing seems to faize you, Hugh.

Can't you just give me a little clue to feed on till you explain it all? It's mean to stir me up like that, you know, old fellow."

"All I can tell you now," said Hugh, who had discovered some one peeping out through the lace curtains at the parlor window, and knew how anxious Sue must be for him to run up the steps and ring the door bell, "is that it concerns Owen Dugdale. So just let your curiosity-mill work on that until I can spin the whole odd yarn."

"Whew! you've twisted me up worse than ever now," he heard Thad muttering, as he hastened to make for the door, where the eager Sue awaited him, having seen the car stopping at the curb.

As Ivy lived only a short block away, they speedily had her installed alongside the chattering Sue in the back seat; though possibly on the way home the girls might prefer to change partners, as Ivy was heard to say she just dearly loved to be alongside the chauffeur when out in a car, because the view was so much better.

On the road they passed several vehicles, all bound in the same direction. Now it was a slow car that managed to roll along "like an ice-wagon," as Thad laughingly called out on going ahead. Then again it was a buggy pulled by a horse; for there were actually a few of these almost extinct quadrupeds still to be found in some of the family stables of Scranton.

"Listen! that must be the carryall ahead of us," called out Thad, not venturing to turn his head

when he spoke, because the road was rather poor, with ditches on either side, while the moon gave rather a poor light, since it had not yet risen above the haze near the horizon.

Some one aboard was noisily tooting the horn, for some boys seem to be up to all manner of mischief every hour of the day, and dearly love to make a noise in the world, even though it rasps on other people's ears distressingly.

Once they arrived at their destination, they found it a very gay scene. The barn had been quite prettily decorated by some of the girls who had come out during the last two afternoons after school to sweep the floor, and instruct the farmer and his helper just where to hang the many lanterns they had fetched along.

There was Daddy Whitehead, with his famous fiddle, which he was already tuning up, so as to be ready to commence operations; while his "band," consisting of Abe Skinner and Mose Coffin, sat there with huge grins on their faces, and also an expectant look. They had undoubtedly noted the huge hampers of eatables that came with each party, and could anticipate a delightful break in the monotony of sawing away, or blowing steadily into that oboe instrument.

Chattering girls and boys were soon strewn all about the place. The farmer and his good wife seemed to be enjoying the picture, since it must have reminded them of somewhat similar episodes in their own younger years, when life seemed

buoyant, and without any trouble such as time always brings in its train.

Soon the first dance started, and immediately the floor was covered with happy couples whirling in the maze of a waltz. More vehicles arrived, and others joined in the festivities. This continued for two solid hours, with brief respites to allow both musicians and dancers a chance to "rest up."

Then some of the girls were called upon to pass into the kitchen of the farmhouse to start work at getting supper ready; though none of the boys were allowed to accompany them, being told that they would only interfere with the work.

It happened that among those who took this duty on themselves were both Ivy and Sue, so that Hugh and Thad found they were without partners. They were feeling a bit fatigued in the bargain, and following the example of several other fellows who were in the same fix, they strolled outside for a breath of cool air, taking care to pick up their overcoats, as they were flushed from exercise.

Here Thad demanded that Hugh explain what his strange words meant with reference to Owen Dugdale. He listened while the other told the story in low tones; for while they believed themselves alone in the moonlight, it was always possible that some other fellow might be loitering close by, and thus overhear what was not intended for his ears.

Thad of course was deeply interested by what

he heard. He, too, declared that it seemed preposterous to think that Owen could demean himself so much as to deliberately steal what belonged to the queer old French madame. At the same time Thad admitted he considered the circumstantial evidence fairly strong.

"My father's a lawyer, you know, Hugh," he went on to say, "and I've heard him say circumstantial evidence has hanged many an innocent man. We ought to go mighty slow about believing Owen guilty without better proof than his having been in the house on both occasions."

CHAPTER V

THE TRAGIC AFFAIR ON THE ROAD

"Let's walk up the road a bit," suggested Hugh. "It's too cool to sit here after getting so heated up inside the barn. And Sue told me they'd be all of a quarter of an hour laying the supper out."

"I'm with you, Hugh. After those cranky dances, it'll do both of us good to step out in some other way than that silly tango, and monkey climb. Have you thought up any scheme yet for learning the truth about Owen?"

"Not yet," came the reply, "though I've several ideas on tap, and may settle on one soon. It's such a serious affair that I'm afraid to hurry too fast. Why, if the boy is innocent, as we both seem to believe, he'd be terribly humiliated if he learned that he had been under suspicion. I've found out he's quite proud, and that's one reason he hasn't mingled with the young folks much since coming to our town. He knows there are strange rumors about his grandfather, and that some people are even talking about Mr. Dugdale as if they suspected him of being a notorious crook in hiding."

"Listen! what's all that loud talking ahead there mean?" suddenly exclaimed Thad.

They both stopped short, and held their breath while listening.

"Would you believe it!" cried Thad, "that was certainly Nick Lang's gruff voice I heard just then. If that chap's around this region, he's come out on purpose to kick up some sort of a shindy. It would be just like his way."

Hugh felt a thrill pass over him. It was as though some innate warning told him he would sooner or later be mixed up in the mess Nick meant to start. Somehow, his thoughts instinctively flew to Owen Dugdale, and he remembered what Thad had remarked earlier in the evening about the possibility of Nick picking on Owen simply because Peggy Noland chose to accompany the other to the hop, in preference to accepting Nick for a partner.

The voices were growing even more boisterous.

"Let's get a move on us, and sprint up that way, Hugh," suggested Thad, unable to restrain his impatience.

"Might as well," the other grimly told him.

Accordingly, they started to run. All the while they could hear disputing voices raised in anger and excitement. Apparently, Nick was aroused, and looking for trouble; when he allowed himself to jump into this aggressive mood, somebody was liable to feel the weight of his heavy fist before the end of the affair came. At least such had always been the case in the past.

Nick was not the only one doing the talking. Hugh thought he several times caught the sound of a voice that might belong to Owen. Then there

were also others in the heated argument, some of them apparently egging the pugnacious Nick on, while yet a few more seemed to be trying to cast oil on troubled waters.

At least Owen was not alone with Nick and his ugly cronies, Hugh realized, though, after all, that would not count for much. Fellows like Leon Disney and several others of the same stripe would be only too well pleased to pair off and attack any other boy who might show a disposition to interfere with the designs of their leader, the bully of the town, big blustering Nick Lang.

Faster still did Hugh and Thad run along. They feared lest something happen before they could arrive on the spot. Both of them were grimly resolved that they would never stand by and see that overgrown fellow abuse a smaller boy like Owen.

As they drew nearer, they discovered that Owen was trying to stand up for his action. He seemed to be declaring that any fellow had a perfect right to ask a girl to accompany him to a dance, and if she did not wish to accept she would say so. He was not trying to cut anybody out, and if Peggy Noland would rather go home with another fellow, Nick, for instance, she had only to say so. But so long as she gave him to understand that she preferred to have him for an escort, he did not mean to be driven away by anybody, no matter if they were twice his size.

Somehow, when Hugh caught the drift of what

Owen was saying, his heart burned within him, for he realized that the boy was made of the right kind of stuff. In build and muscular ability he was no match for Nick Lang; but evidently his courage was equal to any test; and it is that makes the man, not his physique alone.

"Bully for Owen!" Thad could be heard muttering between his pants as he raced along; "if that big coward strikes him, he's going to answer to me for it, no matter what happens."

Now that was just what was passing through Hugh's mind at the same moment. True, a social hop might be one of the last places in the wide world for a boy to allow himself to be drawn into a brutal fight; but if his hand were forced by Nick Lang everything else must be forgotten, Hugh decided.

Somehow, he felt better after that. He could even think of his mother without any burning regret and shame, for had she not impressed it upon his mind years back that no matter how averse a boy may be to entering a fist fight, when it is in defense of a girl, or a smaller lad, he is perfectly justified in so doing, putting aside all his scruples, even his sacred promise to his mother.

Matters were now getting pretty close to the breaking point. They could hear Nick ranting as to what he ought to do to a fellow who played him such a trick as to come between him and the girl he had always taken to hops and singing school.

"Do you know what I got a good mind to do to

you, sonny?" he roared, and doubtless added emphasis to his words by shaking that big fist of his under Owen's nose.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Owen, steadily enough, considering that he must surely know sufficient concerning Nick's ways to understand the danger he was in. "All I say is that I had a perfect right to ask any girl to come to the hop with me. Since she accepted, you must look for an explanation from Peggy. I'm sure I don't feel obliged to ask you whether I can breathe the same air as you do or not. The country is big enough for both of us, Nick Lang. You go your way, and I'll go mine."

"I'll go when I'm done with you, and not a minute before," snarled the other. "So get ready to take your medicine. Mebbe when Peggy sees your nose all bloody, and one eye closed up, with a black circle coming around the other, she won't think you so pretty a sight."

"What's going on here?"

It was Hugh who asked this as he and Thad managed to arrive on the scene, to discover a group of boys standing there on the moonlit road surrounding the two principals in the heated argument, who were facing each other so threateningly.

Nick turned his head to take a look. Even in the moonlight, the sudden grin that came upon his red face was noticeable. Apparently it pleased him to know that the boy whom he had never thus

far been able to coax into a row with him had arrived on the spot. He must have judged that this was a piece of double luck, in that he might take revenge upon the one who had interfered with his pleasure, and at the same time force Hugh Morgan, who had never been known to engage in any rowdy practices, to enter into a rough-and-tumble scrap with him.

"Hello! so you're there, are you, Hugh Morgan?" he called out, with a ring of savage delight in his heavy voice. "Glad you've dropped in just in time to see me give a good friend of yours a little lesson in politeness. Here's Owen saying how he thinks it good taste to step in between a fellow and his best girl. I'm meaning to knock a different notion into his silly head. Sometimes you have to pound things into some people, you understand."

"I'd advise you to try nothing of the sort, Nick," said Hugh, steadily.

At that the other laughed aloud.

"Why, you don't mean to tell me you'd stick in your little oar, Hugh, and try to teach me a few tricks, do you? I could put you on your back with one hand behind me. Fellers that are tied to their mother's apron strings ain't apt to know a heap about how to take care of themselves in a stand-up fight. Mebbe now you're meaning all of you to pick on me? Well, I've got a few nervy pals hangin' around who'd like nothing better than to have you try that game."

Owen had not attempted to escape while Nick's attention was thus taken up with the newcomers, though possibly he might have been forgiven had he done so, considering all the conditions. But evidently Owen had plenty of nerve, even though he might be lacking in brawn equal to the bully's larger figure.

Nick now turned again upon the other. His gestures became even more offensive, as though despite Hugh's grave warning, he meant to attack Owen, come what might, and give him the drubbing which according to his, Nick's light, was long overdue.

Suddenly, without the least warning, his fist shot out. Owen apparently was not expecting such a cowardly blow, and hence must have been taken unawares. The consequence was that the blow landed on the side of his head when he tried instinctively to duck. It sounded horribly suggestive, and made Hugh's blood fairly boil as anger swept over him in a wild wave.

Owen staggered and fell. Gamely, he attempted to scramble to his knees, and before Nick could prevent him had even done this, trying to strike back in return. The boy was furious because of having been dealt such a foul blow; he would have leaped at the giant just then if the necessity arose.

Nick was in his element. Scenes like this were so frequent in his life that he fairly delighted in them, just as another boy less pugilistic in his nature might glory in taking snap-shot pictures,

catching fish, or camping in the woods. Fighting and Nick Lang were synonymous terms, it might almost be said.

Sweeping the threatening hand of Owen aside almost contemptuously, Nick suddenly sent in another swift jolt, such as he knew so well how to deliver, having taken a few lessons from some reformed prize fighter. Poor Owen went down again in a pitiful heap. He did not have the slightest chance against such a master in the art of delivering heavy blows that could not be parried. As one of the boys who looked on with staring eyes, too much afraid of the bully to interfere, was heard to say, it was "like taking candy from the baby for Nick to strike that boy, unacquainted with the art of self-defense."

This time the boy was really unable to do more than struggle to his knees. There he knelt trying to recover his breath, and not yet wholly conquered, though unable to make any further threatening gestures toward his cruel oppressor.

Hugh had already started to quietly remove both his overcoat and the under one. These he handed over to Thad for safe-keeping. Nick saw his actions with keen delight. Apparently, the hope he had entertained of forcing Hugh Morgan into meeting him in a clean-cut issue, to see which would prove the better man, was about to be realized.

"It's just got to be done, I see," Hugh was saying, as he faced the leering victor in the unequal

affair just concluded. "You big coward, I'm going to teach you that there's danger in picking on a boy smaller than yourself. In other words, you're due for a thrashing you'll never forget. Now look out for yourself!"

CHAPTER VI

MAKING A GOOD JOB OF IT

A FIGHT between two boys is not a very pleasant subject with which to deal. In this particular circumstance there were, however, mitigating conditions that would almost make it a pleasure to describe the battle. Hugh was standing up for the rights of the weak, and had only plunged into the scrimmage when he saw that Nick had treated Owen in a most cruel manner.

Once he started in and he meant business. There could be no half-way measures in handling so crafty and unprincipled a customer as the town bully. He must be carried off his feet with the impetuosity of the attack; and while still bewildered thoroughly punished. As Hugh had well said he needed a lasting lesson. Perhaps after this Nick would think twice before attacking a weaker boy, who might have a friend capable and willing to take up cudgels in his behalf.

Nick flourished those big fists of his, and commenced to dance tauntingly around as though meaning to enlist the admiration of his cronies, who had never yet seen him come out of a battle second-best, and therefore deemed him invincible.

Hugh leaped at him with fury glowing in his

eyes. Some powerful fever seemed to have utterly overwhelmed the boy. Thad and those others stared as though they could not believe their vision. Was this impetuous boy who struck down Nick's guard as though nothing could restrain his attack, the same Hugh Morgan who on numerous occasions had been known to arbitrate a dispute, and declare that it was not worth getting into a temper over? A miracle seemed to have happened. The sight of Nick's brutal treatment of Owen Dugdale must have transformed Hugh into a merciless avenger. In that supreme moment he had constituted himself the champion of all those lads in Scranton who, in times past, had suffered cruel wrongs at the hands of the sneering bully.

There was a furious exchange of blows. Nick knew how to fight, but on this occasion something seemed to go wrong with his customary programme. Why, when he hit out his hardest, and expected to see his antagonist reeling back before the blow, to his consternation, it was cleverly warded off, and the next instant something crashed against his own face that made a myriad of luminous stars, never indexed in the galaxy of the heavens, flash before his eyes.

Then Nick was seen to stagger, and fall down. That was perhaps the first time he had ever taken a dose of his own medicine. How often had he stood jeeringly over some wretched fellow whom he had sent to grass, counting him out with mo-

notonous chant, in which the joy of brutal victory was prominent?

"Get up and try it again!" said a stern voice. "That is only a taste of what is due you! I hope you have not had enough yet, you cowardly brute!"

Leon Disney and those two other cronies of Nick's were holding their breath with dismay. They had never expected to see the time when any one could knock their boastful leader out in this easy fashion. What previous opinions they had entertained concerning Hugh Morgan's prowess must now be reversed.

Stung by this taunt, Nick immediately scrambled to his feet. He seemed a bit what he himself would have termed "groggy," being familiar with the slang of the prize ring, but in spite of this he leaped wildly at his enemy.

Thad Stevens feared for his chum when he saw the fury of this attack; but he need not have worried. Hugh was able to look out for himself. Although those boys had never known him to take part in a single encounter, Hugh had apparently made a study of the art of self-defense. There can be no harm in knowing *how* to fight, if one is resolved never to indulge in the game save as a very last resort. And whatever reason it was by which Hugh had bound himself up to the present, apparently the time had arrived when he could break his promise with honor.

There was another brief struggle, exceedingly

brief, to tell the truth. Then, for the second time, Nick, the boss of all juvenile Scranton up to this amazing hour, was thrown heavily to the ground, on which he landed with a terrible crash.

"That's two for you!" said Hugh, in a hissing voice, as though he might be speaking between his set teeth. "Now, if you're able get up again, and give me a chance to finish my job, of which I'm already sick."

Nick was not yet defeated, though it took him longer to rise this time than before. He was wary, too, and plainly disliked the idea of coming in contact with those sturdy arms of Hugh Morgan. Seeing that Nick did not mean to attack him, but had commenced to say harsh things in the endeavor to force his rival to assume the aggressive, in hopes that the advantage would fall to his share, Hugh lost no time in obliging him.

Vain were Nick's most desperate efforts to ward off the inevitable. Hugh had decided to finish the bout with this third round, and the way he pummeled staggering Nick almost dazed Leon Disney and those other fellows, staring as though in the throes of a nightmare.

When for the third time clumsy Nick went down heavily before the attack of the aroused Hugh, he refused to make the least effort to get on his feet. Evidently Nick was a wise boy in one sense; he knew when he had had enough of an unpleasant thing.

"Are you through?" demanded Hugh, sternly.

"If you say the word I'll have some of your crowd stand you up on your pegs again, so I may knock you down. While I'm at it I want to make it a thorough job. Have you had all you want for tonight?"

In deadly fear lest Hugh be tempted to put his threat into execution, Nick managed to swallow his pride, and mumble that he guessed he must be out of condition just then, a fact so evident that Thad had to laugh aloud.

"All right, then," said Hugh, stepping back, for he had been standing over the fallen boy in a threatening attitude, like a Roman gladiator who had thrown his rival, and was waiting to see what signal the emperor gave so as to decide the vanquished man's fate.

He took one look around at Leon and those two other fellows. They quailed before his fierce glance.

"If any of the rest of you feel like having a try with me while I'm in the humor, now's your chance! Don't all speak at once, please," said Hugh, grimly.

When they saw him take a step in their direction, they shrank back. Although not averse to having a little entertainment of the sort at times, none of them seemed to particularly fancy being made a scapegoat.

"We're satisfied, Hugh," said Leon, hurriedly. "Nick got trimmed neat and good. It's been coming to him for a long time, I guess."

There is a saying to the effect that "rats desert a sinking ship"; and when Nick's hour for defeat arrived, even these hitherto admiring cronies threatened to turn their backs on him.

Aroused by this taunt, he scrambled to his feet. Nick was a sight indeed with his face bloody, and one of his eyes giving evidence of going into mourning. He snarled something at Leon with a degree of his one-time ferocity, and the other turned back to assist him off the field. Nick stopped to look back. He made no threat, but the malevolence in that stare toward Hugh told better than words would have done what bitterness was in his heart. No town bully is dethroned without his hating the object of his humiliation. Hugh had better be on his guard, for every one knew that Nick Lang would never rest until he had at least tried to even up the score.

Hugh calmly put on his garments again. Thad and the others were voicing their admiration for his recent gallant deed, but somehow their praise seemed to grate on the boy's nerves.

"Please don't keep on saying those things, fellows," he begged them, presently. "I know you mean it in kindness, but I'd rather try and forget this unpleasant business. I had to break a promise tonight, and it hurts ten times worse than any of the few cracks Nick got in at me. But then my mother always told me she would not for worlds have me stand by and see a bully injure one weaker than himself. I just *had* to do it, that's all

there is to it. And, Owen, old chap, I'm mighty glad I happened to be around to give you a helping hand."

Owen Dugdale had watched all this exciting happening with varied emotions. Each time his detested oppressor had gone crashing to the earth, he seemed to feel his own injuries less and less. When the fight was over, and Nick had received such a decided thrashing, Owen felt like dancing around. He was a boy, every inch of him, with all a boy's feelings; and Nick had humiliated him dreadfully, as well as taken a mean advantage over him on account of his superior strength.

"I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Hugh!" cried the grateful Owen, wringing the other's hand vigorously; "of course this winds up my evening's pleasure, and I was enjoying myself more than any time in my whole life."

"Why should it put a stop to your fun?" demanded Hugh. "What if you have got a bloody nose, and a lump on your forehead. See here how my knuckles are badly skinned, will you; and I fancy I've something of a scratch on my right cheek, where he got to me. We'll wash up back of the farmhouse, you and I, Owen. Of course all the folks will have to know what's happened; but then we needn't be ashamed of the part we took in the little circus."

"Yes, be a sport, Owen," said Thad, encouragingly. "There isn't a single girl at the hop but who will sing out 'good!' when they hear that Nick

Lang met his match tonight. And say, Owen, Peggy Noland will likely clap her hands with joy when she learns of what's happened, and then be extra nice when she sees how that brute marked you. Sympathy is akin to love you know, they say, Owen."

Owen had to laugh at this good-natured "joshing," but he allowed himself to be persuaded to accompany Hugh to the rear of the farmhouse. Here Thad soon secured a basin, and some warm water, as well as soap and a towel. The boys performed their ablusions, and in the end made quite a respectable appearance.

"Why, both of you are all right," said Thad, gaily, after the job had been completed. "Just think how Nick will look when he shows his face again. Chances are he'll stick to his house all day Saturday and Sunday; and when school opens on Monday prepare to listen to a tough story of how he got up in the night and in the dark ran plumb up against a half-open door, which would account for his black eye and swollen face. Oh! I know, because I've spun that yarn myself once."

Supper was announced just then, and the boys trooped in to enjoy the bountiful spread that had been provided for them. A buzz ran around the room, and all eyes were fastened on Hugh and Owen in eager curiosity. Thad thought it up to him to explain what had happened, so that no one might rest under a misapprehension. And when he briefly described how Hugh had so thoroughly

whipped the hitherto invincible town bully, every one applauded. It might be noticed also that pretty Peggy Noland looked at her company with unshed tears in her eyes; and she was unusually good to Owen the balance of the evening, so that he had a jolly time of it, taken in all.

CHAPTER VII

CALLED OUT FOR PRACTICE

When Monday saw the gathering of boys and girls at school, there were two subjects that seemed to engross their conversation. One of these concerned the royally good time enjoyed by those who had been at the barn hop on Friday evening; and of course the other was connected with the meeting held in the schoolhouse Saturday night, at which almost every boy in town had been present, to hear the report of the Athletic Committee, and learn who the lucky ones were.

Of course four-fifths of the aspirants entertained hopes that lightning might be so kind as to strike the little rod which each had modestly erected. There were doubtless burning regrets when the long list had been finished, many disappointed fellows trying to laugh, and appear as though they had never wanted the job anyway.

The call had gone forth for every boy selected to appear on the field immediately after school that same Monday afternoon, for initial practice. There was considerable speculation as to who would finally bear off the honors, and make the first string of players. Being a substitute was as much as some of them had any desire for, for as

such they might share in the glory, and have only a small measure of the actual work.

When just before school took up, Nick Lang came along, he was the "cynosure of every eye," as Reggie Van Alstyne was heard to remark in his elegant way.

Nick had evidently made up his mind to just "grin and stand it." He could scowl in his old fashion, and thus restrain others from being "too fresh." These fellows need not begin to imagine themselves all Hugh Morgans, and they had better leave him alone unless they were seeking trouble.

Dr. Carmack thought it his duty that morning, at general exercises, to speak of the meeting which he had attended on Saturday night.

"It was a thoroughly representative meeting of Scranton young people," he went on to say in his cordial way, which always endeared him to the students of all the schools under his jurisdiction. "The committee carried out their business in a commendable manner, and submitted a list of names of acceptable candidates that in my opinion could not be excelled. Let every one who is given the opportunity to contest for the prizes, do his level best; and when later on the nine has been selected we all hope and believe they will bring great honor to Old Scranton High."

Of course the good doctor had been told about the little affair on the road at the time the barn hop was in progress; but he was a wise peda-

gogue, and made no mention of it in his address. Nick writhed in his seat every time he saw the principal look his way, his guilty conscience causing his fears to rise, with the thought that he might be further humiliated before the entire school.

But the encounter had taken place far beyond the jurisdiction of the school rules; and Dr. Carmack was usually satisfied to let his boys settle these things among themselves. Besides, doubtless, he grimly concluded that Nick, whose reputation as a universal bully of course he knew full well, had been pretty well punished already, since his bruised face and dark-rimmed eye spoke eloquently.

Later on that morning, when Hugh had occasion to go to the office of the Head on some errand, he met with an unusually warm reception.

"Pardon me for speaking about what I know must be a sore subject with you, Hugh," remarked the principal, as the boy was about to depart after concluding his errand. "But I have had a graphic account of that miserable affair Friday night. Permit me to say that you acted quite right, and I commend you for it. The boys of Scranton are deeply indebted to you for punishing a brutal bully. I understand that it has always been much against your principles to engage in a fight; which makes your championing the cause of a weaker boy all the more justifiable."

"Oh! you are giving me far too much credit,

Doctor Carmack," said Hugh, reddening with confusion. "I could hardly claim I had any great scruples about not engaging in such things that are almost universal among boys. But years ago I promised my mother never to let my temper get the better of me; and under no conditions to strike a companion in anger, unless it was to save myself from a beating, or to whip a bully who was abusing some one weaker than himself."

"Then you have a very wise mother, Hugh, let me tell you!" declared the gentleman, who knew boys "like a book," from long association with thousands of them. "She doubtless had her reasons for asking you to take that pledge."

"I have never told even my chum, Thad Stevens, what it meant, sir," said the boy, eagerly, "but I do not mind speaking of it to you."

"Please don't do it, Hugh, if it brings up any memories that you would rather forget," exclaimed the principal, "though I feel honored by what you say."

"But I do not mind telling you, sir; indeed, I would rather do so, for it must seem strange to you that when I can use my fists so well, apparently, I should all this while have avoided every chance for trouble with others. The fact of the matter is, Doctor Carmack, that I am constituted very like my father was; and once upon a time his temper got the better of him, so that he attacked a man who had insulted him, and seriously injured him. That man always had a limp

through the remainder of his life. He and my father became good friends, but my dad could never forgive himself for what he did. He used to say that it was a mercy he had not actually killed the man in his blind passion. And after he died, my good mother, seeing that I had just the same Morgan temper, once I was thoroughly aroused, feared that it might get me into some dreadful trouble. And so she told me about my father, and I made her that solemn promise which, until Friday night, had never been broken."

There was a suspicious moisture in the eyes of the doctor. He squeezed the hand of Hugh vigorously, as though he could easily love such a manly boy.

"Of course you told your good mother all about it, Hugh, when you got home?" he went on to say, with a trace of huskiness in his voice.

"I could not have slept a wink, sir, if I had not gone to her room, and kneeling beside her bed poured out the whole story. She cried a little, because, I suppose, it brought back some old memories that had often saddened her; but she told me again and again I had done exactly as she would have wished me to. Oh! she is the most sensible mother any fellow ever had, I assure you, sir."

"And I also believe that you are supremely blessed in that respect, Hugh," said the gentleman, solemnly. "Be very careful that you never in all your life do anything to bruise the heart of

that noble mother. I thought it best not to mention anything in connection with the matter. For one thing I could see you had done your work thoroughly, and that Nick had already received sufficient punishment. That is all, Hugh, and I thank you for taking me into your confidence."

When afternoon finally came around, and school was over early, there was a scramble among the boys, and a great hurrying home to get a bite to eat, after which, of course, every fellow who had any sort of baseball uniform would don the same, and show up at the grounds to take part in the practice. The air seemed surcharged with some electrical influence. All the talk was along the line of baseball slang. Even many of the girls were drawn to the spot to watch what went on, for they had become enthusiastic, and were in prime condition to "root" for Scranton High when the time came for the first contest on the diamond.

The scene was a busy one, with scores of boys doing various stunts—knocking flies to those in the field, passing balls with the vigor of veterans, and chattering like a lot of magpies all the while. Out of this throng, Mr. Leonard, the athletic instructor, once a Princeton player of some note, was expecting to bring order, and get some kind of game started.

Baseball is quite unlike football. In the latter instance, every boy has to receive an education before he is at all fitted to fill the position assigned to him. There must be long arduous drills

in a dozen particulars, from bucking the line, and carrying the ball, to making a flying tackle, or punting. Then the intricate system of signals must be thoroughly learned, so that instinct takes the place of reason in the carrying out the play.

But every kid plays baseball from the time he can toddle. By degrees they keep on improving their game, so that when they arrive at the dignity of high school freshmen honor, it is only a question of ability, rather than any necessity as to education in the art of driving home a runner, or snatching a liner hot from the bat.

So Mr. Leonard anticipated having only to inoculate his bunch with the proper virus and ambition, after which he could let the drilling do the rest.

Among others who were out was Nick Lang. There was nothing really strange about that fact, because Nick would almost rather play ball than eat; and any boy about whom this can be said must be pretty fond of the National sport. Nick had always shown considerable knack in playing, though he was apt to make himself disagreeable, and want to run things. Possibly this trait might not show so prominently, now that his conceit had been so heavily bumped in his encounter with Hugh. Then again, Mr. Leonard was not the only one to let a boy take advantage of him. He would make sure, if Nick were to get on the nine through his superior playing, to have a substitute handy capable of taking his place; and at the first sign

of insubordination, it would be good-by to Nick and farewell to his hopes of playing on the team.

Hugh was surprised not to see Thad Stevens among those present. Thad had received a summons along with thirty other boys. Hugh guessed it must be something pretty serious that could keep his chum from turning up. Perhaps, when he ran home to change his clothes, his mother had given him an errand to do. Thad was an obedient boy, and although he may have begrudged the afternoon lost, still there would be plenty of time to train for his position, if he had the luck to be selected in the end.

All the time they worked, and afterwards with picked nines played a short game, Hugh kept on the lookout, but no Thad showed up. This was so queer that Hugh made up his mind he must drop in at the Stevens domicile on his way home to supper, and find out what had happened to keep his chum, who was as enthusiastic as himself over baseball matters, from coming around for the first test.

More than once that afternoon Hugh received warning words from some of the other boys concerning Nick Lang.

"He isn't the kind of a fellow to forget and forgive, Hugh, remember," K. K. went on to say, with a shake of his head. "I've studied the beast, and I know how he's made up. Right now he glares at you every time he happens to come near. And if looks could kill, they'd be conducting your

funeral tomorrow, Hugh. He's a tough one, all right, and you knocked the conceit out of his head when you gave him that dandy black eye. Be on your guard, Hugh, and never trust Nick Lang; for he's not only a brute but a treacherous one in the bargain."

But Hugh only laughed on hearing this warning.

"Thank you for what you say, K. K." he told the other. "You make the fourth fellow to tell me about the same thing. But really, I don't believe there's as much danger as you seem to believe. Fellows like Nick are careful not to get struck by lightning twice. The burnt child dreads the fire, they say. Nick's bark is worse than his bite; and I think I've drawn the fangs of the wolf, K. K. Thank you again."

CHAPTER VIII

THAD MAKES A DISCOVERY

When Hugh, on his way home, came in sight of the Stevens place, he was quite surprised to discover his chum Thad seated on one of the low gate posts, and apparently waiting for him to pass along.

"Why, hello! what does this mean, I'd like to know?" burst out Hugh. "After being honored with summons to come out and start practice at baseball, you run home to get on your togs and then forget all about it. But, joking aside, what really did happen to you, Thad, tell me?"

Thad was looking unusually serious, Hugh thought. Evidently something quite out of the usual line must have occurred to detain him; and Hugh, on his part, would not have been a natural boy had he not felt more or less curiosity concerning its nature.

"Oh! that was only an accident," the other commenced saying. "I begrudged losing my first chance to get limbered up; but so far as that goes, there'll be plenty of occasions later on. You see, I had to go on an important errand for my mother."

"It must have taken you out of town, then,"

remarked Hugh; "or else you'd have showed up at the athletic grounds later on."

"The fact of the matter is, I had to run over to Chestnut Hill, which you know is some ten miles away," explained Thad, as he made room alongside for his chum. "It was a matter that could not be delayed, so I didn't even bother running to the field to report to Mr. Leonard. At that I hoped to breeze along fast enough to fetch me back in time to have a little turn with the boys; but I counted without considering that I was dealing with an old car; and sure enough one of the back tires had to take on a puncture."

"And as you didn't carry an extra tire along, you just had to lay off and mend the same," chuckled Hugh. "I was afraid that might happen the other night when on our way to the hop; but we were lucky enough to escape it. Of course, on the road home, I wouldn't have cared much, because all the fun was over by then; and the girls would consider it something of a joke for us to bump along on a flat tire. But I see the old flivver in by the barn, so you did manage to get it home after all, eh, Thad?"

"Oh! yes, though I made a beastly mess of my tire-mending, I'm afraid. I ought to take a few more lessons in that art, because I've always been weak there. And when I found how late it was after getting here I concluded not to hustle around to the grounds. I guessed you'd be cropping up to find out what had become of a certain

baseball crank who had played hookey. So I've been sitting here about ten minutes, I should judge."

"Is that all?" asked Hugh.

"Well, no, it isn't," snapped Thad, "though I wonder how your sharp eyes noticed anything peculiar about my manner. There is a lot more to tell you, Hugh."

"Suppose you get started then, and let's hear of your adventures," the other went on to say, with kindling interest. "Did any tramp try to hold you up on the road; or was it necessary for you to stop and help put out a fire in some farmhouse; like the time both of us had that pleasure, and received the biggest dinner we ever got away with as a reward?"

Thad shook his head in the negative.

"If you kept on guessing all day long I don't believe you'd hit the mark, Hugh. Still, in one sense you're right when you call it an adventure; though a pretty mild one. I'll tell you about it."

"Wish you would, Thad," grumbled Hugh, pretending to look anxious to hurry along on his way home. "Playing ball for three hours gives a fellow a ferocious appetite, you know; and we have chicken pot pie at our house tonight, which is one of my favorite dishes. So please get a move on you."

"Well, after I managed to mend my tire, being set on accomplishing the job if it took me till dark, I started along the road, and presently drew near

town. That was about half an hour ago, I should imagine. I had just stopped to take another look at the tire, which seemed to be flattening more or less, when I heard some one calling weakly. When I turned to look I found that by some accident I had stopped exactly in front of that queer old place which we've always called the Rookery, because it looks as if spooks might live there."

As Thad paused to catch his breath, Hugh elevated his eyebrows. Apparently his interest no longer flagged, for he instinctively guessed that something unusual must come out of Thad's mention of the strange old place, where, as he well knew, Owen Dugdale and his eccentric grandfather lived by themselves.

"When I caught the sound of a voice again," continued Thad, "I was interested, because I had heard the one word 'help' uttered. Some one must be in trouble, I told myself; and then all of a sudden I remembered who lived there. So I started my machine and moved off the road, to leave it clear for other cars to pass by if any came along. After that I jumped out and hurried over to the stone wall that, as you know, surrounds the wild-looking grounds of the place.

"The voice still sounded, and I could see somebody lying on the ground there. I vaulted the low stone wall, and soon found that it was old Mr. Dugdale. He seemed glad to see me, though really he didn't know me from Adam, because I had never had a word with him before.

"While out taking exercise in the grounds he had been suddenly seized with an acute attack of rheumatism or sciatica in one of his legs, and had been unable to get back to the house alone. Then seeing me stop and step out to look at my mended tire, he had called as loud as he could, to attract my attention, hoping that I'd be kind and neighborly enough to help him to the house; for as he explained to me his grandson Owen was off playing ball just then."

"Yes," Hugh broke in with, "Owen was on deck, and did splendidly. He may be able to make the team if he continues to improve. So you, of course, assisted the old gentleman, as he asked, and got him safely to his house?"

"Yes, that's what I did," replied Thad, "and it seemed that his pains began to leave him once he got to walking. He said it was characteristic of the disease to come and go suddenly and mysteriously. When we arrived I had to help him up the steps, for he insisted on my coming in. Well, to tell you the honest truth, Hugh, I was a little curious to see what that queer old house did look like inside, and so I didn't hold back at all. Now, you've likely never been there yourself, even though you've been getting pretty intimate with Owen lately?"

"Once he asked me to step in, but it happened that I was in a hurry to get home. I supposed some time or other he would renew the invitation, but I also remembered that his grandfather was

said to be queer, and averse to meeting strangers; so I've thought nothing about it. Well, is there anything more coming, or does that end your adventure?"

Thad drew a long breath, and looked sober.

"I only wish it did, that's right, Hugh," he continued, mysteriously. "Up to then the whole thing hadn't amounted to a row of beans, so far as giving me a thrill went. But the worst was yet to come."

"Go on, and don't stop so often, Thad," urged Hugh. "I believe you do it just to tantalize me. What wonderful secret did you discover there? Is that old house the rendezvous of a nest of counterfeiters, or might it be where they manufacture moonshine whiskey, like those mountaineers do down in Georgia?"

"Oh! come, it's nothing like that, Hugh, so don't allow your imagination to carry you away. I did get something of a shock, though, and I guess you'll feel the same way when you learn about it. Well, the old gentleman asked me who I was, and if I knew his grandson Owen, as well as a lot of other questions. Fact is, Hugh, I rather guess he must have taken a violent liking for me right on the spot, for when I said I must be going two different times, he begged me to stay with him just a little while longer.

"I knew I would be too late for the ball practice anyhow, and besides I didn't have on my old suit, because mother had asked me not to wait

to change my clothes. So I sat down again each time, and answered some more questions. The old gentleman interested me a whole lot in the bargain, and I soon made up my mind that those silly people who had been hinting that Old Mr. Dugdale might be that notorious Wall Street speculator who had such a bad name, and who'd disappeared several years ago, didn't know what they were talking about. Why, he is a polished gentleman, and a foreigner at that, I tell you, Hugh.

"He started talking about his grandson. How his wrinkled face lighted up when I said my chum, Hugh Morgan, had taken a great fancy for Owen, and that I shared in the same feeling. You could see easily enough that Mr. Dugdale believes the sun rises and sets in that boy of his. Nothing would do, finally, but that he should take me to seen the den Owen had fitted up for himself, because there was plenty of room in the big house, and every fellow he knew had some kind of a den in which he could keep his boyish treasures, in the way of foreign postage stamp albums, photos taken by himself connected with outings he had been on, college flags and burgees, and well, just such traps as the average boy liked to see around him when he's out of school, and settling down to read a favorite book.

"Of course, Hugh, I told him it would be too much for his aching leg, but he assured me the pain had now all left him; and he wanted to know

if there was anything I could suggest that Owen might have to add to his comfort while at home, studying his lessons or reading. So I went with him upstairs. Say, it's a real queer house, and must look a whole lot spooky at night time; because they only burn lamps and candles, for there's no electricity connection at all, or any gas either, I suppose.

"At the end of a long hall we came to where three steps led down into a room. It was a bully place, I will say that, with plenty of light from a lot of small dinky windows that faced on three sides of the room. Owen had fixed it up in good taste in the bargain. He must have plenty of spending money, because there were lots of traps around, from a pair of expensive snow shoes hanging on the wall to a splendid toboggan tilted up in a corner.

"In fact, Hugh, the place was pretty well filled with boy truck. It looked cozy to me, and I ought to know something about a boy's den; haven't I arranged mine seven separate times, until now it's back where I started? Well, of course, to please the old gentleman, I walked around, and peeked at things and told him Owen had as fine a loafing place as any boy in Scranton; which sort of talk seemed to tickle Mr. Dugdale a heap.

"Then, Hugh, I got my shock, all right. It seemed to grip my heart just as if an ice-cold hand had been laid on it. You see, in nosing around I chanced to set eyes on something that lay half

hidden among some papers on a side table. Hugh, you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw that it was a souvenir tea spoon, an ornate one at that, representing some foreign city, I don't know which, for I was too flustered by my terrible discovery to look close. Now, what do you think of that?"

CHAPTER IX

JUST BETWEEN CHUMS

"Oh! I'm sorry to hear that, Thad!" exclaimed Hugh. "Are you dead certain it was a souvenir spoon you glimpsed? Couldn't you have been mistaken?"

The other boy shook his head in the negative.

"I sure wish I could say so, Hugh, and that's a fact," he replied; "but I've got pretty good eyes, and I ought to know what such things look like, for hasn't my mother been collecting the same for ten years now. Of course, ours are all of this country, representative of cities and places she and dad have visited. But this one was different. I'm as certain as anything that it must have come from some foreign place, because the style and marking stamped is of no American workmanship."

Evidently, what he had just heard caused Hugh considerable anxiety. It seemed as though things were getting darker for Owen Dugdale with every passing day. Even stout-hearted Hugh felt his doubts rising. He wondered if, after all, he had made a mistake in his judgment of Owen, and his belief in the boy's honesty. Hugh remembered some of the things that were being said around

town concerning the old man of the dismal place called the "Rookery." His aversion to meeting people, as well as other odd traits about him, had caused no end of talk. Some even said they were not Americans, but foreigners, English possibly.

Altogether Hugh felt considerably exercised. He shut his teeth hard together, however, and told himself that no matter how many suspicious circumstances seemed to surround Owen, he would still continue to have faith in the boy.

"Whenever I think of Owen's clear eyes," he told Thad, "and the way they look you fair and square in the face, I feel positive that boy can't be a sneak and a thief. No one with such honest eyes could do mean things. Such fellows are patterned on a different model nearly always."

"Well, I've believed a good deal as you do myself, Hugh," admitted Thad. "Just take that Leon Disney, for instance. There's a chap who never could look straight at any one he was talking to."

"You're right, Thad. He keeps on shifting his eyes up and down all the while. I've often noticed it about Leon, and made up my mind it was an uneasy conscience that made him act so."

"Then, after all I've told you, Hugh, you still believe in Owen?"

"I'm going to hold firm until the evidence is all in," said the other.

"You're a good friend, I must say," Thad hastened to observe, a gleam of honest admiration showing in his eyes. "I only hope you'll stand

by me as well, in case I ever get into any trouble, that's all."

"I'd stand by you to the last ditch, and then some," Hugh told him, with an affectionate smile; "for we're chums, and what's the use of having a pal unless he'll go through thick and thin for you. But I'm a little surprised about one thing, Thad."

"Do you mean about my actions in that house, Hugh?"

"I should have thought you'd been quick to say something about the spoon, so as to draw the old gentleman out," continued the other.

"Oh! I didn't dare do such a thing as that, Hugh. It would have been pretty bold in me, you know."

"There might be ways to do it without seeming rude, Thad. For instance, what was to hinder you from picking it up and expressing your admiration for such a thing. Then by using your eyes, you could have told whether Mr. Dugdale was surprised at seeing the spoon there, or not. His actions more than anything he might say would have given you a pointer, don't you see?"

"Yes, I can understand that all right, now you've mentioned it, Hugh," chuckled the other. "It's so easy to grip a thing after some one has shown you how. Remember those envious Spanish courtiers who tried to take Columbus down a peg by saying it was a simple thing to discover America, since all you had to do was to set sail, and heading into the west keep going on till you

bumped up against the islands that at that time they thought were the East Indies. Then, you remember, Columbus asked them to stand an egg on end, which they tried and tried without success, until he gently cracked one end, and it stood up all right. Oh! yes, I can see now I might have done a lot of things that didn't happen to occur to me just then."

"I'm sorry you let such a good chance slip by without nailing it," said Hugh.

"Well, it might happen," added Thad, as though an idea had come into his brain like an electric flash, "that another opportunity will come along, and if it does, I give you my word I'll learn something worth while."

"How did you like the old gentleman," continued Hugh; "and after meeting him, do you take any stock in the stories that have been floating around town about his being the clever rascal who disappeared from Wall Street two years ago?"

"Why, he seemed very pleasant, so far as I could see," replied Thad, slowly. "Course I don't pretend to be a smart enough reader of human nature to say positively that old Mr. Dugdale is all to the good; but he is well read, and I seemed to see what looked like a twinkle in the corners of his eyes as though he might have a fair sense of humor in his mak-up."

"He liked you, too, didn't he, Thad?" continued Hugh.

"Well, to be honest with you, I really believe the

old gentleman did act a little that way. Perhaps it was because he'd heard Owen mention my name as one of his few friends; and Mr. Dugdale was wanting to show how pleased he felt to know me. Yes, he acted as if he would like to see me again; in fact, he asked me to come in some time, and visit Owen in his den, for the boy often seemed lonely, he told me."

"Poor Owen! let's hope this will all come out right in the end, then," Hugh finally said, as though his own mind was made up not to allow the latest discovery to influence him against the Dugdale boy.

"But we've got to admit," added the other, seriously, "that it adds to the tangle a heap, and makes it look worse than before. However, I'll try and learn a thing or two. Give me a little time to get my slow wits working, Hugh; and I may have more news for you. All the same, it wouldn't surprise me if you took a spurt and came in across the line ahead of me."

"Whatever makes you say that?" demanded Hugh.

"Oh! I know you so well, that's all," laughed his chum, giving him a nudge in the side with his elbow. "I wager the chances are ten to one you're beginning to turn over a little scheme in your mind right now. How about that, Hugh?"

"If I am," retorted the other, "I don't intend telling you the first thing about it until there's some solid foundation for the theory to rest on."

"Same here," chuckled Thad, with a wink that had a deal of significance about it, Hugh could see. "Mebbe I've got a whiff of an idea myself that might turn out worth while; but wild horses couldn't drag a hint of the same from me so early in the game. So we're quits on that score, you see, Hugh."

The other jumped down off the wide-topped post, as though he thought he should be continuing on his way home.

"I must be going, Thad," he remarked. "Supper-time, almost, you know; and besides I have some chores to do. When a fellow will keep pets the way I do, he's got to expect to spend some little time looking after them. I wouldn't want to let any of mine suffer for lack of attention."

"And I wager they never do, Hugh!" declared the other, with his customary stanch faith in his chum. "You have it fixed so that your homing pigeons can always get feed from a trough that allows only a scant ration to come down at a time, your 'lazy boy's self-feeder,' I've heard you call it. And as for those fine Belgian hares that would take first prize at any rabbit show, they live on the fat of the land. Right now you're cultivating a bed of lettuce for them, as well as a lot of cabbages, and such truck. Oh! no fear of any dumb beast, or bird going hungry when it has Hugh Morgan for an owner."

"Thank you for the neat compliment, Thad," said Hugh, the glow in his eyes telling how much

he appreciated such honest praise. "I may have my faults, like every boy has, but being cruel to or neglectful of little creatures that are in my keeping isn't one of them. I'd hate to think I could let a poor rabbit go hungry. I'd get out of bed in the middle of the night, cold as it might be, and go out to my hutch, if I got an idea in my head that I'd left a window open that might allow a draught to blow in on the poor things."

"Well, I don't take to pets the same as you do, Hugh, but all the same I can understand how you feel about them. It's the right way, to, and no boy with any heart in him could be mean to helpless little animals. I warrant you I know one fellow in Scranton who wouldn't get out of his warm bed for any pet that ever lived."

"I suppose you're meaning Nick Lang," remarked Hugh. "Well, I don't know. To tell you the truth, that boy is a mystery to me. Sometimes I think that, bad as he seems to be, Nick isn't quite *all* yellow; that there's a little streak of white in his make-up."

"Why, you surprise me, Hugh, when I hear you say that, and after all you've seen of his mean ways, too. Think how he started to beat poor Owen up that night; yes, and for years back he's been a big bully, trying to have things his own way, and ruling by might of his fists. Why, nearly everybody in Scranton believes him to be utterly irreclaimable. What makes you say such a queer thing?"

"I may be mistaken after all," said Hugh, slowly, "but here's a singular thing I saw only yesterday. I haven't mentioned it to a living soul, but it set me to thinking, and wondering whether, after all, if a big hulking fellow like Nick were given a fair chance to make good, he mightn't change and astonish the neighborhood.

"I was going along a side street when I got a thrill. There was a buggy with a frisky horse attached standing in front of a house. The man had gone inside and very imprudently left his child, a little fellow of some five years of age, to sit there in the vehicle, not even bothering to hitch the beast.

"Well, the boy, like most kids would do, had started playing with the whip; and I saw him give the horse quite a blow. No doubt he was imitating his father in doing that. The spirited beast started rearing, and then acted as if about to make a dash down the street. It would have been putting the child's life in danger, you can easily see.

"I started to run, but never could have made it. Then I saw some one jump for the horse's head, and have a little tussle with the animal. It was Nick Lang. He hadn't stopped to think of any danger to himself. I drew up and watched him. He conquered the beast, fastened him to a hitching post, and then started to scold the white-faced little boy for having touched the whip. The bully was showing in his nature, after all, that splendid exhibition of nerve and quick wit.

"Nick noticed me then, for the first time, and acted confused, as if caught doing something he would not like folks to know. He shook his finger in the boy's face again threateningly, gave me a sneering look, and then stalked along down the street whistling like anything. And, Thad, the boy who could do a thing like that off-hand can't be quite *all* bad, though people oughtn't to be blamed for thinking he is. So-long, Thad!"

CHAPTER X

A VISITOR FROM BELLEVILLE HIGH

On the following afternoon, which chanced to be Tuesday, more boys than before appeared at the recreation grounds for practice. Mr. Leonard had sent out an urgent call for every one of the numerous candidates to be on hand, since they expected to organize two nines. They would have a fierce game, in order that he might have an opportunity to watch the actions of every aspirant, and get pointers as to his capacity for filling a gap.

The boys appeared in all sorts of suits, some even hunting up football togs because they had no others handy, and felt that they must make some sort of a show at appearing in uniform.

But the suits would be ready on time, for a local tailor had agreed to make as many as were needed of various sizes, and to have them done with a rush. Already Mr. Leonard, being furnished with ample funds, had ordered bats and balls, bases, and all manner of necessary adjuncts that go with a well-organized baseball team. Meanwhile, they must make a virtue of necessity, and do the best they could with the stock in hand.

After some knocking of balls, and catching of flies, the boys were tooled off in two fairly matched

nines, and a game was started. They had just got well along in this, when Thad, who was sitting on a bench alongside Hugh, it being their turn at bat, suddenly remarked:

"Hello! we're going to be spied on, it seems, Hugh; for notice that chap coming along on his motorcycle, will you? Don't you know who he is, just because he's wearing a pair of big goggles, and has his cap pulled down over his forehead? Why, that's a Belleville boy named Oliver Kramer. They call him O. K. for short; and I kind of guess it stands for his character pretty well, because he's straight. I'm a little surprised to see *him* nosing around here today, trying to find out what sort of crowd Scranton High can put in the field."

"Oh! there's nothing queer about that, Thad," Hugh remonstrated, quickly. "You can easily see it stands to reason those fellows over in Belleville are anxious to get a line on what we expect to do, so as to know just how much push they ought to put in their own work. He isn't trying to spy things out, or he wouldn't come up so boldly. See, there, he's starting to speak to Mr. Leonard now, and the old Princeton athlete is shaking hands with him. Like as not O. K. has a dad who used to be a college-mate of Mr. Leonard."

Hugh himself, followed by Thad, walked that way. Hugh had been told by Mr. Leonard that he was to be the field captain of the Scranton High team. In fact, that seemed to be taken for granted

by all the boys, who were very well satisfied to have such a general favorite and all-round good athlete for a leader. Consequently, Mr. Leonard had caught Hugh's eye, and made a beckoning motion with his hand, evidently wishing him to meet the Belleville boy.

But the two had run across one another on several previous occasions, it happened. Hugh shook hands with O. K. cordially, as did also Thad. The latter was already ashamed of having entertained such thoughts in connection with this friendly visit of the owner of the motorcycle, whom he had always known to be a fine chap.

"Our fellows are practicing this afternoon, just as your crowd is, Captain Morgan," O. K. was saying. "I would have been with them, only yesterday I happened to hurt a finger a bit, for you see I'm the catcher of our nine, and it was thought best for me to lay off a few days so as to let it mend."

"And you dropped over to see if we were making any headway, I suppose?" remarked Hugh, while Mr. Leonard went off to resume his duties, anxious to see every play that came along; for he would not have much time to decide on the line-up of the team, which must afterwards get all the practice possible, in order to do Scranton High justice.

O. K. laughed good-naturedly.

"I hope, now, you won't suspect me of being a spy, and trying to pick up pointers which might

serve us later on in a hotly contested game," he went on to say. "Fact is, I'm so much of a baseball crank that I live and move and have my being in the great game. I came over hoping to find you'd made a bully good start, because we Belleville boys want your strongest team to face us a week from next Saturday. We expect to win the game, that goes without saying, but none of us will be satisfied to have a regular walkover of it."

"Make your mind easy on that score, O. K.," snapped Thad, aggressively. "We expect to have a lot of hard-hitting and splendid fielding boys on the diamond, who will be out for blood. If you get the better of Scranton High, you'll deserve all the praise you receive; and we'll be the first to give you a cheer."

"Well, I'm beginning to believe a little that way myself," admitted O. K. in his frank way, as Nick Lang knocked out a screamer that went far over the head of the center fielder. "That chap is a born batter. I reckon, now, he must be your best card in the pack."

"Oh! we've got a few others who can meet the ball," advised Thad, proudly. "Watch that throw-in', will you? Mighty few fellows could send the ball all the way from deep center to the home plate, as straight as a die. That kid's name is Sandy Dowd. You may not be so glad to see him work later on, O. K. Just warn your sluggers they needn't expect any home-runs if they put the ball out in center."

They stood there and watched for some little time. Occasionally the boy from Belleville would make some remark. His eyes sought the agile figure of the athletic instructor from time to time.

"One thing you Scranton fellows are lucky in, which is, having such a splendid coach as Mr. Leonard. Why, he used to go to Princeton with my dad, as I only learned a day or so ago. He's coming over to take dinner with us next Sunday. Let me tell you, he's some peach of a physical director. Dad says he was one of the most popular fellows in college, and that as a half-back on the gridiron, he made a reputation second to none."

Hugh and Thad looked especially pleased to hear this outside praise of the man for whom they themselves had come to entertain the utmost respect and admiration.

"Yes," said Hugh, warmly, "we expect that if Scranton has any show in the games that are to be played in the Three-town League this season, most of the credit will lie at the door of Mr. Leonard. He seems to be a wonder at getting a boy to bring out every atom of energy and vim that lies in him. Only Nick Lang acts surly under him. That's the big fellow who made that three-bagger a while ago. He's the bully of the town."

"Used to be, you mean, Hugh, up to the time—" began Thad, when the other shook his head at him discouragingly.

"None of that now, if you please, Thad. We

want to forget bygones, and only remember that we're in the baseball world these days. There, Eli hit the ball a good hard smack, but it went straight at the short-stop, who handled it neatly for an out. Our turn out in the field now, Thad. Glad to have seen you, O. K. Carry a message back home to Belleville for me, will you? Tell your fellows Scranton High has found herself at last, in the world of sports, and is primed to give both Belleville and Allandale a hard tussle for the prize."

"I'll tell them that with pleasure, Captain Morgan," replied the other, "and add a few remarks of my own about what I have seen of your hustling crowd over here. May the best nine win, and the contests leave no after bitter sting. If we can't get the prize, we'd be glad to see you fellows beat Allandale, because they'd be unbearable if they won two years running."

O. K. soon afterwards mounted his motorcycle and went spinning along the road like a streak, leaving a cloud of dust behind him, also an odor of gasoline. The practice game continued with varying fortunes. In fact, it mattered very little which side won, as various pitchers were being tried out under the eagle eye of Mr. Lawrence; his principal object being to form an opinion as to the respective merits of the many players.

When another afternoon they met again, doubtless Mr. Lawrence would have decided to eliminate several of the players as utterly beyond hope

of ever making the regular nine. So by degrees he would decide who was best fitted for each and every position, with a number of able substitutes, who coud be called on should there be any change necessary during a game, from injury, or because a certain player failed to do what was expected of him.

After the game had come to an end, and the crowd commenced to separate, as usual, Hugh and Thad started to walk home together. They overtook Owen Dugdale and hastened to join him. Both boys doubtless had a little thrill just then, remembering how often the other had been in their thoughts lately.

Owen seemed to be in great spirits.

"I never knew that I had it in me to become so fond of baseball as I seem to be doing right now," he told them. "Of course I played a little at several kinds of games like cricket, and since coming here to Scranton I've been knocking flies for some of the boys, and playing in scrub games. But now I enjoy it ever so much, though, of course, I don't dream that I'll have the good luck to be selected for the team, when there are so many who know more about the game than I do."

"You can safely leave all that to Mr. Leonard, Owen," said Hugh. "I've been keeping tabs on your play at short, and honestly, I want to say, you're doing mighty well. I heard Mr. Leonard say so, too. While you may not be picked for that position, there's a likelihood that you will be held

as a substitute. Only practice your batting all you can, Owen; that's your weakest point. I'll show you a wrinkle about bunting that may help you a lot."

"Thank you, Hugh, ever so much!" exclaimed the other, his fine eyes glowing with gratitude. "You've always been mighty kind to me, for a fact. Was that boy on the motorcycle one of the Belleville fellows? I thought I heard Otto Brand say so."

"Yes," replied Hugh, "his name is Oliver Kramer, thought they call him just O. K., as we dubbed our comrade K. K. for short. He hurt his hand, and is laid off for a spell, because he is the catcher of the Belleville High team, you see. O. K. is a fine chap. He ran over here to see what we were doing, and to warn us we'd have to get a hustle on if we hoped to have even a look-in, because Allandale is working like anything, while Belleville means to do her best this year."

"Belleville had better get a move on," suggested Thad, caustically, "unless she wants to share the fate of poor old Lawrence. Both teams beat Lawrence so badly last season that her club disbanded, for the fellows started to squabbling among themselves, which of course ruins any organization going."

So, chatting as they walked along, the three boys finally parted at a corner where their several ways led in different directions. Hugh glanced back over his shoulder once in the direc-

tion of the receding figure of Owen Dugdale. What was in his mind just then it might be hard to say; but at least the expression on his face would indicate that his former confidence in the Dugdale boy had not yet been extinguished.

CHAPTER XI

HUGH'S PETS IN DANGER

"ROTTEN luck, Hugh, to have that practice game called off this afternoon just because it rained a little. The ground wasn't drenched very much, and we could have done some work, anyhow. But it's too late now."

Thad was on the way home from school on Wednesday afternoon when he said this. He had hastened and overtaken the other a block or so away from the campus. Already the rain had stopped. Mr. Leonard, however, had sent word around that there would be no baseball practice that day; but for every one to be on hand Thursday P. M., as no excuses would be taken for absence, when every day counted so much now.

"Hold on, please, Hugh and Thad!" called some one from the rear; and looking back they discovered a lame boy called Limpy Wallace, who always carried a crutch and had to twist his body in a curious fashion when he wished to make speed.

Limpy could get over ground wonderfully well, considering the difficulties under which he labored. More than once he had been held up by Doctor Carmack to the other boys at Scranton High as a rebuke for their laziness. If a fellow who had

so much to contend with could always appear so satisfied, and manage to get along as well as he did, they ought to be ashamed to dawdle, and waste time when they had all their faculties intact.

Limpy Wallace was a constant and consistent admirer of Hugh Morgan. In fact, he might be said to fairly worship the other boy, who had always treated him most kindly, and seemed to sympathize with his having been cheated by a cruel Fate out of the ordinary pleasures connected with the average boy's life. Limpy Wallace would have gone far out of his way to do Hugh a favor. He now came bounding along, with his crutch making rapid jumps, and apparently every muscle in his poor distorted body in action.

But his thin face was lighted up with eagerness. Evidently, it was no ordinary motive that had caused the lame boy to exert himself so earnestly in order to overtake the two chums.

"I've got something to tell you, Hugh," he panted, for he was almost out of breath, owing to his exertions; an ordinary boy might have run over that same stretch without showing it much, but it must have been a strenuous undertaking for the cripple.

"Glad to hear it," laughed Hugh. "I'm waiting to have some one tell me that our team is going to wipe up the ground with both Allandale and Belleville when we come to grips. Is your news of that sort, Limpy?"

Of course he was only joking when he said this.

Every one called the other Limpy, nor did he seem to mind it a particle; indeed, only from the teachers at school and his folks at home was it likely that he ever heard his name of Osmond spoken.

"Shucks! it hasn't a thing to do with baseball, or any other outdoor sport, Hugh," the cripple hastened to say. "Because I heard your name mentioned plainly I felt that you ought to know what little I managed to pick up."

"All right, then, Limpy, start ahead, and spin the yarn," said Hugh. "Has some one been remarking what a poor excuse of an athlete Hugh Morgan is; and that he ought never to have been given his job as field captain of the Scranton High baseball team? It's no more than I expected, Limpy, and my feelings can't be hurt a bit; so don't try to spare me."

"Listen, then, please, and you, too, Thad, seeing that you're his chum," began the other, eagerly. "It was just an accident, you understand, because I never yet was intentionally guilty of trying to overhear what other fellows were saying. I had been tired out at recess, and was lying down on that bench, you remember, that stands in the corner of the grounds. It happens to have a back to it, and I guess no one could notice me there. The other fellows were walking around in bunches, and talking to beat the band. All at once I heard your name spoken, and in an angry voice; so I just raised my head a little to take a peep. Who

should I see standing near by but that big bully, Nick Lang, and his faithful shadow, Leon Disney."

Thad dug his elbow into Hugh's short ribs as if to emphasize the remark just made by Limpy Wallace. When two such arch schemers as Nick and Leon got off by themselves, and were seen to have their heads together, the chances were there must be some mischief afloat.

"Well, after that I just lay still and listened, because I felt sure they must be getting up some sort of a game to play even with you, Hugh, because you gave Nick such a beautiful trouncing the other night, so I was told. It was hard luck that I could only catch a word now and then, for some of the boys were calling out to each other; and that silly clown, Claude Hastings, had begun to sing one of his comic songs, while he capered around like a baboon. But I did hear Nick say the words: 'Get even,' 'show him who's who in this burgh,' and 'Belgian hares.' Do they put you wise to anything, Hugh?"

"I should say they did, Limpy!" ejaculated the impetuous Thad, even before Hugh could speak the first word in reply. "Why, who's got prize Belgian hares in Scranton but Hugh Morgan? Now, that cunning old schemer, Nick Lang, knows how much Hugh thinks of his pets, and the chances are ten to one he's hatched up a scheme to steal or kill every lasting one of the rabbits. It would be just like him. Hugh, of course you'll

be forewarned, and take the necessary precautions to nip his little plot in the bud."

Hugh himself looked serious. A slight frown could be seen on his usually calm and reposeful face.

"I could stand almost any attempted injury to myself a lot better than having my poor dumb pets made the object of revenge," he went on to say, soberly. "Limpy, this is certainly news you've brought me. I'm a thousand times obliged to you for taking the trouble."

"Oh! not at all, Hugh. Why, there's nothing I wouldn't do to help pay back all your kindness to me in the past. Some people think a lame boy has no feelings, but you've never considered it so; you've always acted as if you felt mighty sorry for a boy so badly afflicted. And I can never forget how you shamed Pete Garinger into begging my pardon for something mean he threw at me. All I hope is that you catch those curs in the act, and give them what they deserve, if they really try to hurt your poor little pets."

"Make your mind easy on that score, Limpy," asserted Thad, with his accustomed show of confidence, "we'll fix a trap to get the sneaks, should they call in the dead of night. They'll think they've run up against a threshing machine, all right, when Hugh and myself start in to maul them."

"Suppose you come over later in the afternoon, Thad," suggested Hugh, as they arrived at their

customary parting spot. "Meanwhile, I'll take a look at my rabbit hutch, and try to figure just how we can turn the tables on Nick and Leon, if they should pay me a visit tonight."

"Make it as severe as you can, Hugh," begged Thad; "nothing could be too hard for a pair of miserable schemers who, to get even with a fellow they dare not face openly any longer, would creep into his rabbit house like thieves in the night, and either steal his property, or injure it so that there'd be no chance to exhibit the hares in a show."

"See you later on, and we can tell better then," was all Hugh said, for if he had any idea simmering in his brain just then, he did not care to mention it until he had found a chance to "look around," as he termed it.

"I'll be across inside of half an hour, you can bet on that!" called out Thad, as he hurried away.

He was as good as his word. Indeed, Hugh had hardly started to make his investigation of the premises before he heard his chum come through the gate, slamming it after him.

There was an outbuilding back of the barn, which had been intended for a storage house of some sort, but not used by the present occupants of the premises. This Hugh had commandeered, and fitted to his purpose. The upper part he had made into a pretty fine loft for his fancy homing pigeons. When the first of his pedigreed young-

sters arrived at the flying stage, he meant to have considerable fun taking them ten or twenty miles away, and then letting them loose, in the expectation of finding them at home when he got back. After that, it would be longer flights until he could learn whether he had any record breakers in his flock.

In the lower part of the building, Hugh had his long-eared Belgian hares. There was now quite a family of them, what with the old ones, and seven strapping youngsters. Hugh took great pleasure in watching his pets, and figuring out how he could improve on their quarters, so as to make them more comfortable in every way.

"Well, have you struck any promising scheme yet, Hugh?" demanded Thad, as he breezed into the hutch, seeming to guess that he would find his chum there, and not in the house.

"I've just been fixing things in my mind," returned Hugh, quietly, "and trying to determine how any intruder would expect to get in here. Why, up to now such a thing as having my hares stolen never once occurred to me. Really I'm surprised to find what confidence I've been placing in all Scranton; when there have been bad eggs among the boys from away back. Do you know I've never had a fastening on this window here, not even a stick to hold the lower sash down. It's about time I woke up and insured the safety of the poor things."

"But you do lock the door every night," inter-

jected Thad; "because I've seen you do that same thing."

"Oh! just as a matter of form," confessed the other, "for I've never dreamed it was necessary. Any fellow could have climbed in by that window of a night, if he'd chosen to."

"Do you suppose, Hugh, that Nick Lang knows about that unguarded window?"

"I was figuring that out," mused Hugh, "and, really, I believe he does. I'll tell you what I base that supposition on. Some time ago, a fellow came to see me, and tried to buy a pair of my hares; but his figures and mine didn't agree, and so we failed to make a bargain. But I showed him my place here, and he examined it all through. I even can remember that he gave the window a little upward push, speaking at the time of the necessity for all pets to have plenty of pure air, or their dens would become foul smelling. That boy was Tip Slavin, and I understand that he's pretty thick with Nick and Leon. They must have heard about his visit here, and pumped him dry. So if they do make me a night visit, depend on it this window will figure big in their calculations."

Thad chuckled as though pleased.

"That makes it simple, then, Hugh," he went on to say, exultantly, "for with such a thing settled, it ought to be easy for us to hatch up some scheme to play hob with their plan of campaign. It'd just about serve the sneaks right if we set a spring-gun trap that'd give them a dose of fine bird-shot;

but then I don't suppose you'd want to go quite as far as that. Look here, Hugh, I believe right now, you've already settled on some sort of surprise for those fellows when they come snooping around here. If that's a fact, you're going to up and explain its workings to your best chum, ain't you?"

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAP

Hugh heard his chum through, and then quietly went on to say:

"Yes, I have got a little plan that ought to teach them a lesson, and cool off their ardor a bit. In the first place, we can easily rig up a small platform just above this window here. I've got several stanchions and a board. It wouldn't take us more than half an hour to complete it, I reckon. But we must make it extra strong, you know."

"But I don't know," pleaded Thad, helplessly. "Why should this lovely little shelf up there be so strong? Are we going to perch on it, and drop down on top of the night birds after they let themselves in? Is that the game, Hugh?"

"Not quite, Thad. It's the tub that must balance up there!"

"Tub! Great Scott! are you figuring on giving Nick and Leon their usual Saturday night bath?" gasped the other, still groping in the dark.

"Something like that," chuckled Hugh, "only it will be *such* a surprise to those chaps, and cold, too, ugh! as cold as ice can make it."

"Go ahead and explain a lot more," Thad demanded. "I'm beginning to get just an inkling of the game. Whew! I believe you've been read-

ing of the pranks the fellows play in the boarding schools, with a tub of water suspended over a door, so that when an unlucky boy opens it he is drenched to the skin."

"That's about the idea," Hugh acknowledged. "Nothing particularly brilliant or original about it, I own up, but the best we can do under the circumstances."

Then he went on to explain the particulars, showing Thad how the tub could be balanced nicely, so that when a cord attached to it was jerked, it would tilt over beautifully, discharging its full contents without itself falling down.

Thad listened, and grunted. Plainly he was a bit disappointed.

"It sounds pretty good, Hugh," he admitted, finally, "and will of course give the rascals a great scare; but seems to me as if it's hardly vigorous enough. According to my mind, we ought to make the punishment fit the crime. When a couple of low-down scamps try to kill the dumb pets of a fellow who has never gone out of his way to harm them, and are caught with the goods on, they ought to be treated to a dozen good wipes with a cowhide whip, something that'll make 'em yell bloody murder. But just as you say, we can try this dodge, and discourage them from any more funny business around your coop."

"Then the sooner we start in and get busy, the better," suggested Hugh, whose motto had always been that of "strike while the iron is hot."

Thad was ready to do his share in any labor, so that presently the sound of much sawing and hammering oozed out from the rabbit hutch, where the chums continued to work for nearly an hour.

At the end of that time they had completed the job so far as the platform over the window was concerned. Hugh had done more than this, for by cleverly arranged boards he constructed a regular trap; so that when the boys managed to climb through the window, they would naturally crouch down directly in range of the coming waterspout.

"There," said Hugh, finally, "that is all done, and I think fills the bill. I'll go after the galvanized iron wash-tub now."

"Be sure and fetch the biggest one you can," suggested the greedy Thad, with a sly grin. "You see, we ought to deal generously with our guests, even if they're uninvited ones. I believe in going the whole hog when about it."

"Depend on me to do the right thing by Nick and Leon," Hugh assured him. "When I have visitors drop in on me in this off-hand way, I always want to be ready to treat them well. But I'm afraid they'll think our reception committee rather frigid, eh, Thad?"

He soon came back bearing a massive tub that aroused the admiration of Thad.

"That certainly is a jim-dandy wash-tub!" he declared. "I'm glad now we made the shelf big enough. I reckon you had the dimensions of this

thing in your mind when doing your measurements, Hugh."

Next they lifted the tub on to the platform above. It could be readily balanced on the edge so that a very slight pull from the cord would tilt it forward, when the propensity for water to seek its own level would do the rest.

They tested it a number of times, and it worked splendidly. "When filled with water, it would only add to the gaiety of things," Thad said, fervently.

"But where will we be all the time, Hugh?" he now asked.

"I've arranged all that," he was assured. "One of the objects of these upright boards is to act as a cover for us, as well as to form a trap for our guests. You see, I happen to know that Leon Disney owns a hand electric torch like the one you showed me the other day that your uncle in the city sent out, and which I want you to fetch over when you come after supper. Just as like as not, he'll use it through the window before they try to enter, so as to make sure the coast is clear. That's why I've been so careful not to leave anything around that might excite suspicion."

"Just so," laughed Thad, merrily, for as he was not going to get an icy ducking, he felt as though he could afford to be happy; "after fellows have worked so hard to jimmy their way into the premises of another, it'd be a shame to discourage their efforts in the beginning. We might paint a sign 'welcome,' and put it over the window, Hugh, just

to let them know everything is lovely, and the goose hangs high."

"I'll step outside, and take a peep in through the window to find out how things look," suggested Hugh, which he proceeded to do.

"Nothing to excite anybody's suspicion that I can see," he announced. "The tub is completely out of sight, just as I expected it would be, and even the cord connecting it with our hiding place couldn't be noticed unless you knew all about it beforehand. I guess our work is done, all but filling the reservoir."

Procuring a bucket, they set to work. One carried and the other poured, standing on the short step-ladder in order to better reach the elevated tub.

"There, it's as full as I dare make it," Hugh finally announced.

"And for one, I'm not half sorry," Thad added, "because toting water isn't altogether fun. That bucket is heavy enough to nearly pull your arms out of their elbow sockets. You said something about *ice,* didn't you, Hugh?"

"Yes, I had that in mind. After supper, when we come out here to take up our vigil, I'll get a lot of small chunks from the ice-house and put it in the water. It'll make it lovely and cold, I warrant you, unless our guests delay their coming too long."

Nothing more being necessary, the boys adjourned to the house, where in Hugh's den they

talked various matters over with the customary enthusiasm of live boys. Naturally, these affairs, as a rule, concerned the athletic happenings just then on the carpet, and particularly the baseball rivalry about to break out in a series of hotly contested games between Scranton, Belleville and the formerly victorious Allandale High team.

Later on, Thad went home to his supper, though Hugh had pressed him to stay and share his meal; for they were often at each other's table.

"Like to," said Thad, shaking his head, "but it happens I've got a few things I ought to attend to. Then again there's that hand-torch you asked me to fetch over with me. Another time will have to do, Hugh."

Hugh laughed scornfully.

"Tell all that to your grandmother, Thad, will you?" he exclaimed. "Just as if I didn't know that your folks religiously have corned beef and cabbage every Thursday night, which is a favorite dish with your dad, likewise with a certain fellow of my acquaintance. Now, *we're* only going to have chicken pot-pie at our house, and of course that doesn't appeal to you like your pet fare. Oh! well, I understand how things go, and I'll let you off this time. I don't believe you've ever taken a meal at my house on a Thursday since I've known you."

Thad laughed as though not at all abashed.

"I guess you're on to my weak spot, all right, partner," he hastened to say in the boldest man-

ner possible. "But really and truly, I have got some things I want to do, though of course they could be postponed if absolutely necessary. Some time perhaps you'll be having my plebeian dish over at your house; then try asking me if you dare."

He turned up about seven o'clock, just after darkness had set in, for the moon was getting very old now, and a late riser. The two boys sat in Hugh's den for considerably more than an hour, talking and planning. Both showed vague signs of nervousness, however. Thad in particular frequently walked over to a window and looked out. Doubtless he was thinking what a joke on them it would be if the marauders came much earlier than expected, when all their fine work with that tub of icy water would go for naught.

"Hadn't we better be making a start, Hugh?" he finally asked. "Don't forget we have to handle that ice first, and get things ready."

"All right," the other replied. "We'll make for the rabbit hutch, and here's hoping that we don't have a long watch all for nothing."

The ice was soon procured. Hugh cracked it in rather small pieces. He did this for two good reasons. First it would chill the water more speedily when in this condition; then again the chances of knocking one of the interlopers on the head with a heavy lump of ice falling quite some distance would be obviated. Hugh did not intend that this prank should end in a tragedy, if he could help it.

When everything had been arranged to suit Hugh, the boys retired within the rabbit hutch, and the door was fastened with the padlock, which Hugh could undo when the time came by leaning far out of the open window.

They took up their positions in the place already selected, and wrapped in complete darkness awaited coming events. The time passed very slowly, but since they had dressed warmly, they did not suffer from the chilly air, for it was only April, and the warmth of summer still far distant.

Nine o'clock struck. Bless that town clock, by means of which they could tell the hour; for Thad was beginning to believe it much later than it really was. He yawned, and stretched a bit, shifting his position. Then Hugh touched him on the arm, and his low whisper came in Thad's very ear.

"Sh! something stirring outside!"

Thad had heard it, too. Either the night wind had arisen, and was sighing through the branches of the big oak that hung partly over the rabbit hutch, or else some living object had moved; for what the boys heard as they crouched there quivering with suspense and anticipated victory was certainly in the nature of a creeping sound.

Yes, now there came to the ears of Thad what must be low whispers. Nick and his fellow conspirator had undoubtedly arrived and were scanning their contemplated field of operations!

CHAPTER XIII

A COLD RECEPTION

THEN the boys in hiding saw a strange glow around them. Undoubtedly Leon was making use of his electric hand-torch, and both of the intended raiders must be pressing their noses against the glass of the small window, trying to form some sort of idea as to what awaited them.

Neither Hugh nor Thad more than breathed. The latter clutched the stout cord in a firm hand, ready to give the quick jerk when he believed the proper moment had arrived.

Apparently, the fellows outside must have concluded that everything was just lovely, for they could now be heard softly opening the window, and pushing the sash carefully back out of the way. While climbing in through the opening thus made, they did not wish to thrust a foot against the glass, and cause a smash that might be their undoing; oh! trust that shrewd general, Nick Lang, for looking out against any such accidents; he had been in this business a long time now, and understood all the ins and outs of it.

More low whispering followed. Evidently, Nick was trying to coax Leon to climb in first, so that he could light the way with his torch; but that sly fox held back. It was Nick's special game,

and consequently he should be the one to do the honors of the occasion.

After a little grumbling beyond the open window, Thad and Hugh heard the soft pad of shoes scraping against the boards. Nick had started to enter. The yawning aperture, and the apparent lack of any signs of danger lured him on. Ah! if he had only dimly suspected what a wonderful reception awaited him in that same rabbit hutch, undoubtedly Nick could not have been tempted to take that important step; indeed, he would have turned and run for it with all speed.

But "when ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," the old saying runs; and Nick was happy in not having a glimmer of the truth.

He should not be long in making his entrance. The window was only five feet from the ground, and within easy reach. Besides, Nick was an unusually strong boy, which fact in itself had been one reason for his having been able to play the part of town bully as long as he did.

The sounds changed their nature. Evidently, Nick had managed to pull himself over the window-sill. He was now inside the hutch, perhaps kneeling on the floor, and directly under the tilted tub that stood on the shelf above!

Hugh gripped his cord still more firmly. It was almost time for something to happen. Perhaps before another minute had passed the avalanche would descend, and give two startled fellows the surprise of their lives.

Now Nick was lending his companion a helping hand. It may not have been through generosity that Nick acted thus; perhaps he dimly suspected that the cowardly Leon might wish to draw back, and allow him to carry out the nefarious business alone and unaided; and Nick was bent on making his crony share in the act, so that he could not turn on him and betray him in the future.

Yes, Leon was coming along. He made more noise than the other, for Nick could be heard growling, and telling him to be careful if he didn't want to fetch the owner of the rabbit hutch down on them with blood in his eye, and perhaps a stout baseball bat for a weapon.

Thad softly chuckled on hearing this. No doubt, in his mind he was saying that something in the way of a reception far less warm was hovering over the heads of the two "innocents abroad." That made Thad think of Mark Twain, and he wondered whether the illustrious Tom Sawyer and his chum, Huckleberry Finn, had ever arranged a more fetching reception committee than this one of Hugh's.

Leon seemed quite clumsy about climbing up; the fact of the matter was, he came rather unwillingly, and might have held back only that the determined Nick had taken a firm grip on his coat collar, and held on tenaciously, bent on making sure of having company in his dark deed of slaughter, or robbery, whichever he had in mind.

Thad would have given almost anything for the

privilege of taking a sly peep; but he had been sternly enjoined against doing this same thing by Hugh. The other, however, found it necessary to put his head beyond the corner of the upright boards, so as to make sure that both boys were there, and ready for their bath.

One brief look was enough for Hugh. Leon had depressed his hand-torch so that its glow only fell on the floor; but enough light was diffused throughout the place to disclose two kneeling figures directly under the tub.

Hugh waited no longer, but gave the cord a strong pull.

There was a sudden surge, and down came a terrific Niagara of icy water that completely deluged Nick and Leon. They let out involuntary yells that were of a piercing intensity. Nor was this all, for Hugh must have given the cord an extra hard pull, or else the fastenings of the tub had not proved stanch enough; for down it came with an infernal jangling that must have completed the fright of the precious pair of intruders.

Indeed, it even gave Thad a start, with all that racket, and the cries of the terrified boys adding to the volume of sound.

"Now give us some light, Thad!" called Hugh, wishing to glimpse the drenched culprits before they could scramble through the opening again, and make their escape.

Thad was so excited he could hardly remember what he had done with his new electric hand-torch.

So he ran his fingers around on the floor, feeling here and there in eagerness, all the while strange sounds coming to their ears from the other end of the rabbit hutch.

Then he managed by accident, or great good luck, to touch what he was searching for, and instantly Thad flooded the place with its illumination, after which both of them stepped forward.

They were just in time to glimpse a pair of legs vanishing through the opening. Then came a heavy crash accompanied by dismal groans, after which they heard the sounds of footsteps as the two boys scurried around the building, wishing to keep from being seen. When Hugh and Thad looked out of the window there was no one in sight.

They turned and stared at each other. Then Thad doubled up like a closed hinge, and shook with boisterous laughter.

"Oh! what a circus that was, Hugh!" he cried. "Why, I don't know what I'd have given just for a chance to watch those two chaps swimming around. And, say, that big tub falling must have nearly scared Leon to death. I wonder now, did it happen to hit either of them when it came tumbling down after emptying out all the iced water? Oh! I'll laugh myself nearly sick every time I think of this dandy trap of yours."

Of course, the interior of the Belgian hares' quarters was a sight to behold, after all that downpour; but anticipating this, the careful Hugh had

placed his pets where they could not be injured by the flood.

"See here what they left behind them," remarked Hugh, picking up what turned out to be a stout gunny-sack. "Well, I'm glad to find this, because it seems to prove that they meant to steal my hares, and not kill them."

"Just about as bad in the long run!" declared Thad, scornfully. "Like as not that Nick would have thrown them into the river, with a stone tied to the bag, in order to hide all traces. Then, no matter how much you might suspect them, you couldn't prove a thing. But Hugh, they made a terrible slip if they figured on that, because, see here what I've found."

He held somthing up.

"Leon's hand-torch, for a certainty!" exclaimed Hugh. "In his sudden fright he lost it, and was in too great a hurry to think of trying to find his property again."

"You've got him where you want him, all right, Hugh," snapped Thad, suddenly. "All you have to do is to leave this here and fetch Chief Wambold around to notice that it lies in your rabbit hutch. Then Leon will have to explain how he came to leave it here."

"Oh! I sort of feel that those fellows have been punished enough as it is," the other went on to say, slowly.

"You're too easy on the skunks, Hugh, take my word for it," said Thad, with a trace of disap-

pointment in his voice. "A fellow like Nick Lang never can appreciate such a thing as leniency. You've got to give him what he believes in, and that's brute force. Well, then, if you won't have Leon arrested, at least you can keep this hand-torch as a trophy of the momentous occasion. It'll serve to remind you of this pleasant night's entertainment. While not so fine a torch as mine, still it seems to be O. K. You'll do that, I hope, Hugh?"

But the other shook his head.

"I don't want the thing, Thad, I assure you I don't," he said. "I'll send it to Leon with a little satirical note, telling him that while I thank him very much for leaving me his torch, I have always made it a rule not to accept presents from those who were not my intimate friends; and that, therefore, I'm returning it with the hope that in the future he may put it to better use than in the past."

Thad laughed.

"Oh! well, you must have your way, Hugh, I reckon; and really, that will set the pair guessing. They'll understand we're on to their identity, and of course will be more or less anxious to know just what you mean to do about it."

"One thing I'm sure of," added Hugh, "which is, that Nick Lang can never be made to change his habits by harsh measures. Some of these fine days I may find a chance to do him a great favor; and by heaping coals of fire on his head, force him to see a light."

Thad heard his chum say this with more or less astonishment. Apparently, while he had the utmost faith in Hugh's ability to do most things, at the same time he considered that this would be in the form of a miracle. He smiled, and again shook his head in the negative.

"Well, you don't believe they'll come again tonight at any rate, do you, Hugh?" he asked, as they prepared to leave the rabbit hutch.

"Not one chance in ten," the other told him. "I mean to fix this window so it can't be easily opened. Besides, my window is on this side of the house, and I've got a cord arranged whereby a weight will fall on the floor of my room if anybody tried to get in here, after I've fixed the little jigger. I own a shotgun, you know, Thad, and can fire up in the air out of my window if there's any alarm. Tomorrow I'll put heavy wire netting over the window, that will insure the safety of my pet Belgian hares, and my homing pigeons. Now let's be heading toward the house, and going to bed; for you promised to sleep with me, you know."

CHAPTER XIV

NICK AS A GAP-STOPPER

On Saturday afternoon the field was the scene of another gathering. Almost every boy in town had come out to see what success the Scranton High fellows were making with their new team. Besides, there were many little knots of high-school girls present, all eager to watch some fellow in whom they felt especial interest. Then, from time to time, older folks began to show up, until quite a gathering could be seen in the grandstand and on some sections of the bleachers.

Perhaps Scranton did not possess as fine buildings as Allandale, for instance, because the spirit of sport had long been rampant in the other town, while Scranton seemed to have been half asleep until latterly; but they were good enough, and commodious in the bargain. The field itself could hardly have been surpassed. It was unusually level, and stretched away to such a distance that it must needs be quite a slugger who could make a home-run hit on those grounds.

Still it had been done. There was at least one member of the team who had shown an ability to send the ball out over the head of a fielder, and to such an astonishing distance that by the time

it was recovered and returned to the diamond, he had raced completely around the circuit for a home run.

Mr. Leonard had by now completed his choice of the team. He had watched the play of the boys, and decided on just who best seemed fitted to fill the various positions. Of course, as time passed, this schedule of players was subject to possible changes, but on the whole the physical instructor believed he had built up the strongest team Scranton could put in the field that season.

Much must depend on the pitching staff. It remained to be seen how the twirlers would "pan out" under fire. At present Mr. Leonard was working strenuously, trying to put more "ginger" into their work; and also teaching them some of the wrinkles of the game, as known to semi-professionals like himself.

Greatly to the surprise as well as delight of Owen Dugdale, he had been notified that he was to cover short. Indeed, others were not as much astonished as Owen himself, because they had been admiring the splendid way in which he fielded his difficult position there, accepting chances that many fellows would have allowed to let get by them for fear of making an error, and with wonderful success.

Once Owen got his hands on the ball, and he could shoot it across to first like a rifle bullet. His accuracy and speed were simply grand; everybody cheered when he sent the ball "screaming" across

to the man guarding the initial sack; or on occasion hurled it to Hugh on third for a double.

Then again, Owen was improving in his batting. Hugh had gone to great pains to give him many pointers, and the fruit of this was seen by the clever way in which Owen could lay down a pretty bunt, the ball rolling along just inside the line in a tantalizing fashion, and headed for first or third, as the occasion might require. The player who can be depended on to bunt successfully two times out of three attempts is always a valuable accessory to a club; since he is thus able to push a runner along; and perhaps get his own base in the bargain, when the others are busily engaged in trying to catch the fellow on the bases.

Short-stop must always be an agile chap, who is especially quick both at decisions and throwing. Even though he snatch up the ball, and thus make a fine stop, if his judgment is poor or his throwing arm lame, he can often bungle his work, and prove of little help to his team.

There would still be another full week before the first game with Belleville. If fair weather favored them the Scranton boys hoped to put in daily practice, and speed up in their team work, as well as signals. The pitchers, too, needed considerable more practice before they could be said to be at their best; in fact, they would all be better off for two more weeks of hard work, which, however, could not be obtained.

Two teams were made up for this afternoon,

one of them the regulars, and the other a "scrub," though with some fair players aboard, mostly substitutes. Mr. Leonard himself meant to play at various positions for the latter team. He chanced to be one of those remarkable all-round handy men, capable of filling a job as catcher, first baseman, second, short-stop or fielder. He even astonished the boys during the afternoon play by taking his place as a slab-artist in the pitcher's box; and some of his shoots and drops puzzled the hard hitters on the regular team, so that they whiffed at thin air, and thus passed out on strikes.

The pitchers had been evenly divided, and all showed considerable ability after their caliber. Some seemed to have considerable "stuff" with them, and mystified the batters with their delivery. Others were hit freely, and runs were either earned or else made with the assistance of errors more or less glaring.

The weak places in the team's play were being noted by Mr. Leonard, who would take measures to stop the leaks after a fashion of his own; through advice and practical instructions, if he could; and should these means fail, then by a radical change in the line-up.

As Hugh had been made field captain, he would have charge of the playing to a considerable extent. On this account, he took an especially keen interest in all that went on. When Nick Lang, who played centre field, made a difficult catch of a great fly from Mr. Leonard's bat, no one ap-

plauded more than did Hugh; while Thad behind the bat stood and scowled, for somehow he disliked the idea of the town bully having any part in the team's work.

When he took occasion to speak of this during their turn at bat, as he and Hugh sat by themselves on the lower bleacher seats, watching the game, the other took him to task for his way of thinking.

"You've got to get over that personal way of thinking, Thad, when you belong to a ball club like Scranton High," he said, earnestly. "Now we all know what Nick is, and few fellows like to play in a game where he has any part; but remember that he is one of the high-school students, and on that account has just as much right to aspire to a place on the representative team as you or I."

"But he always makes trouble wherever he goes," expostulated Thad, still unconvinced, it seemed; "and mark my words, he'll do something to try and break up this team, if things don't go just to suit his ideas."

"Please don't forget Mr. Leonard when you say that, Thad. Depend on it, he's going to keep his eye on Nick right along. If the fellow shows any insubordination, he'll get his walking papers like a flash, and perhaps be booted off the grounds in the bargain, if he gets too fresh."

"Well, perhaps you're right, Hugh," grumbled Thad. "Mr. Leonard must know a heap more than a boy like me, who sees everything on the surface.

And I admit that was a cracking good catch Nick made, after such a hard run. He can field, all right, and he is a gap-stopper in center field, for a fact."

"There, look at him send out a screamer right now, that ought to be good for a double!" exclaimed Hugh. "You see, we need Nick on the team. He is one of our mainstays at bat and in the field. If only Mr. Leonard can control him, he's apt to be of great assistance to us in winning games. The boy who would take his place isn't really in the same class with Nick as a player. So let's try to forget all about our natural aversion while we're playing ball. If we act that way, the other fellows are apt to follow suit. And, Thad, conquering your feelings may be the means of bringing a glorious victory to Scranton High. Wouldn't you think yourself well repaid for just repressing your antipathy toward Nick Lang?"

"Of course you're right, Hugh, as you nearly always are. I'm so quick-tempered I make all sorts of silly blunders. But look there, I can see a cloud of dust up the road yonder. Now I wouldn't be at all surprised if we had another friendly visit from that Belleville fellow, O. K. He's taking quite an interest in Scranton, it seems, and has run over again this Saturday to find out how we're improving. We must jolly him along, Hugh, and never let him see we're feeling a bit of anxiety over our pitchers."

Sure enough, the rider of the motorcycle proved

to be Oliver Kramer, the same boy who had been over before to take a look at the Scranton players. He came alongside the two chums sitting on the bleachers, and deposited his machine so that it would be safely out of the way.

"Hello! fellows!" he remarked, cheerily, as he held out his hand to Hugh. "Here I am again, right side up with care, as the clown in the circus always says. Glad to meet you again, Captain Morgan, and you also, Thad Stevens. Mr. Leonard was over to dinner at our house Sunday, and he invited me to drop in any old time, and see how your crowd was making out. I hope now you don't object to my being here, Hugh?"

"Not in the least, O. K.," Hugh told him, smilingly. "We're pushing along pretty fairly, and ironing out some of the wrinkles as we go. Lots still to be done before we're ready to try conclusions with your team at Belleville; but with such a capable coach as Mr. Leonard, we believe we'll get there in time."

They watched the play go on. There were some really clever stunts done that called for loud cheers on the part of the small crowd present. O. K. added his strident voice to the shouts.

"Great work that, old top!" he shouted at Sandy Dowd, who had made a magnificent steal to second, after getting first on a single, his slide amidst a cloud of dust being the grand climax of the feat; for though the catcher sent the ball down in a direct line to the baseman, still the red-headed

Sandy had his hand on the bag at the time he was touched, and there was no disputing the "safe on second" of the umpire.

For three innings did O. K. sit there and enjoy the game. He was a baseball enthusiast of the first water, and never could get quite enough of his favorite sport. Of course he preferred taking part in a game, but the next best thing was to watch others play, and comment on their mistakes; just as most people can play the critic while watching a game of billiards and always feel they could have improved on the shot that missed connections.

"Well, what do you think now, O. K.?" asked Hugh later on, when the Belleville boy made preparations as though about to start homeward. "Do you notice any improvement in our work? Have we gone up or down, in your judgment?"

"Yes, be honest, now, O. K., and say," asked Thad. "We can take criticism without flinching. You know what your team can do; have we any show against Belleville, or that strong aggregation at Allandale?"

"Honestly, between man and man, fellows," said the other, earnestly, "I can see the greatest sort of improvement in your play. When you get your team work down a bit better and closer to scientific principles, you're going to make both the other clubs in the Three-Town League hustle some to hold their own. I'm glad to see it, too, because it means we'll have to do our level best if we hope

to win. And that insures some mighty lively ball games during the short season while we're playing against each other."

Hugh felt satisfied, for he believed O. K. to be quite honest in what he said.

CHAPTER XV

PRETTY POLLY UNDER SUSPICION

"Hello! Thad, that you?"

"Nobody else, Hugh. I rather thought I'd hear your voice when I stepped over to the 'phone. What's doing this fine Sunday afternoon?"

"Are you in for a little walk with me, Thad?"

"Just what would please me a heap, Hugh. Anything particular moving?"

"There you go suspecting that I've got something on tap just because I call up and invite you to cover a few miles, when the weather is so fine. But for once you've hit the nail on the head, my boy."

"That settles it, then. I'll rush right over, and join you, Hugh."

"Be careful and don't break your neck in your hurry, Thad. My news can keep; and what would poor Scranton High do for a catcher in the game next Saturday if you fractured your collar-bone?"

Whether Thad took the advice to heart or not, he certainly made his appearance at the home of his best chum in an incredibly brief space of time, flushed in the bargain, and with an eager light lurking in his eyes.

"Nothing doing until we get safely out of town,"

said Hugh, firmly; "so you'll have to put the brake on your impatience."

"Huh!" grumbled Thad, "that sounds as if what you had to tell me was of vast importance, so that you didn't want to run any risk of others cribbing the news. Now you have got me guessing to beat the band, Hugh. I wonder if those Belleville fellows have been up to any dodge to learn our signals, and how our pitchers are practicing certain pet balls?"

"Oh! I'll relieve your mind that far by telling you it has nothing whatever to do with the game next Saturday; for that matter it's not about baseball at all. You're doing those fine chaps at Belleville a gross injustice to even hint at their thinking of spying on us."

Thad grinned as though he had won a point.

"Well, I take it all back, then, Hugh," he hastened to say, contritely. "And now that point's settled, there's only one more thing it could be about."

"Notice that shrub bursting into bloom, will you?" remarked Hugh. "No one ever saw a prettier sight than that is right now."

"Have you learned anything more about——"

"We'll take a turn here, and walk along the canal toward the big mill-pond," interrupted Hugh. "That's always a favorite walk of mine; and, to tell the truth, I haven't been out to the mill-pond for a long time. The fishing there hasn't been very good this season, some of the boys told

me. Besides, I've been kept so busy with my studies, baseball matters, and several other things I'm interested in, that I haven't had much time for fishing this spring. Nobody loves it more than I do, either, as you happen to know."

Thad heaved a sigh, and shook his head.

"No use trying to coax you, Hugh, when you've made up your mind not to let out even a little peep. A fellow might wheedle until he fell over, and you'd still be as hard as adamant. Yet it's right. Makes me think of the old saying that a single man can lead a mule to water, but a dozen can't make him drink—not comparing you to a mule, of course."

They chatted as they walked, until presently the town had been left behind them.

"Now I'll open up and tell you what's been worrying me," announced Hugh, suddenly. "The fact of the matter is, I was called over to Madame Pangborn's this morning after getting home from church. She told me a third spoon has disappeared!"

"Great guns! is that so, Hugh? And, say, was Owen there on the day it went glimmering?" demanded Thad, frowning.

"I'm sorry to have to say yes to that," returned Hugh, slowly. "It was yesterday it happened. She persisted in leaving the spoons just where I saw them. I advised her to do that, for if they were hidden away we might never discover the thief. As on the other occasions, Owen came in

with a bundle for the Red Cross, sent by the same lady who had intrusted him with a package twice before."

"All I can say is, it's getting a heap serious for our new friend, Owen. Hugh, do you think the poor chap might be what they call a kleptomaniac; that is a person who has an irresistible inclination to take things that don't belong to him, or her, and generally has no use for them after stealing the same? It's really a disease, I've read. Some very rich people are affected by it, particularly queer old ladies."

"You're jumping ahead too fast, Thad," remonstrated Hugh, chidingly. "I haven't admitted yet that I suspect Owen more than I did before. In fact, these occurrences, such as his being in the house each time a spoon vanishes, may turn out to simply be coincidences."

"That sounds just like you, Hugh. You're the best kind of a friend anybody ever could have. Perhaps now you've got a clue of some sort that you wouldn't mind telling me about?"

"I've been wondering whether the culprit is a human being after all," remarked Hugh, to the utter astonisment of his comrade, who burst out with:

"Whew! you're aiming high, I must say, old chap. If not a human being, what sort of a creature could the clever thief be? I've heard of monkeys stealing things and hiding the same away in a spirit of covetousness; but then the old lady

doesn't happen to have a simian for a household pet, that I know of."

"No, but she *has* got a poll-parrot, as I told you, Thad!" observed Hugh, calmly.

"Oh! do you suspect that a silly bird could go and carry off not only one spoon but three of them?" gasped the other boy. What would a parrot want of such objects, and where would she hide them?"

"Remember, this is only guess work on my part, because, so far, I haven't any positive evidence that it's so. But I remembered once reading an article about some birds having a weakness that way. Generally it was a raven that did it, and hidden away in a dark corner they would find trinkets and spoons and all sorts of things that were of no possible use to any bird. In every instance they seemed to be bright and tempting, as if the bird had no eye for dingy things. Well, these spoons have recently been scoured and cleaned so that they shine splendidly!"

"Oh! now that you mention it, Hugh," broke out Thad, "I remember that several years ago, before I knew you, with another boy I climbed a tall tree to peek in at the nest of a pair of crows. Well, sir, besides the young ones, what did we find but three strange things. One was a key, pretty rusty at that; another seemed to be a piece of metal that might have fallen off a motor car on the road; it was made of brass, and still shone fairly well. The third I've forgotten about,

though I've still got them all at home somewhere. At the time, Dick Saunders and I laughed, and said the old mother crow had fetched her babies some playthings to keep them amused while she and her mate were off hunting grubs and corn and such crow food."

"Well, all of which goes to prove that my little theory mightn't be so far fetched as you seemed to think in the beginning," said Hugh. "I mean to look around closely the next time I drop in to see the Madame. Perhaps if I picked up a tiny green feather that must have come from Pretty Poll, and on the table close to the case that holds the spoons, it might clinch matters."

"Whew! I only hope you do!" declared Thad. "I'd hate to learn that Owen had any hand in taking those spoons. The sooner we find out the truth, the better for all concerned. It'll not only relieve our minds, as well as that of the old lady; but either prove or disprove the suspicions we're right now entertaining toward that poor boy."

He looked very determined when saying this, just as though he had made up his own mind to hasten the dénouement; but of that he did not say anything to Hugh.

"My plan at present is to find a chance to hide in the room, and have the old lady let her parrot free to fly around," continued Hugh, reflectively. "You see, as a rule, the bird is held by a fine chain, and made to stay by her perch; but the lady as much as admitted, when scolding her pet, that

every now and then Polly managed to get loose by pecking at the ring about her leg; and had a great time flying squawking in and out of the rooms before anybody could catch her again."

Thad clapped his hand in glee. He had changed his mind considerably after hearing all these things in the line of a convincing argument, as mentioned by Hugh.

"Why, if it should turn out that way, Hugh, it'd make a story well worth writing up for the magazines, or a big New York daily paper. I hope now you'll get busy on this scheme right away, so we'll know the truth. Parrots are mighty cunning birds, for a fact. I knew one once that used to mock everybody going by. What fun we boys used to have trying to teach him to say things that mebbe his mistress wouldn't exactly approve of, though, honestly, Hugh, they weren't very tough, just boys' slang, you know. I'm glad now you asked me to take this walk with you. For all we can tell, it may have some influence in solving this puzzle that's got both of us guessing."

When Thad said this, he of course could have no idea how near he was hewing to the truth. That walk was fated to have a very considerable influence on the course of events, and also upon the solving of the riddle; but we must not anticipate.

The two lads continued to saunter along. They chatted on other subjects besides the mystery of the old lady's lost souvenir spoons. The matter

of outdoor sports was much in their minds those days, when sleepy old Scranton was waking from her Rip Van Winkle nap of twenty years, and girding herself to accomplish a few things on the diamond and the gridiron.

So they drew gradually nearer to the famous Hobson mill-pond, where for generations the boys of Scranton had been accustomed to swim and fish in the good old summer time, and skate in the winter, the canal leading close to its location.

The old mill was no longer in use, but with its moss-covered wheel made a very picturesque sight that artists often painted with delight. The pond itself was of fair size, and surrounded with trees and bushes. In fact, it was quite a lake. On one side there stood a large ice-house, and when the surface of the pond was covered with a foot of clear firm ice, many of the residents of the town had their supply cut and stored in places built partly underground, in order that they might have all the ice they wanted through the dog days.

Hugh and Thad had almost arrived at the mill-pond when they suddenly heard loud voices. There was screaming in shrill tones that would indicate the presence of children near by.

"What does all that row mean, Hugh?" snapped Thad, looking suddenly interested.

"They're playing around the pond, those kids, and like as not one of them may have fallen in! Let's get a move on us and see!"

Hugh seemed to be of the same opinion, for he

started on a rapid gallop. Louder rang out the shrill cries. There could be no doubt now as to some one being frightened; and considering the loneliness of the mill-pond region, it was easy to guess Thad had hit the truth when he surmised that a child must be in danger of drowning.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RESCUE AT HOBSON'S MILL-POND

The two boys covered the short distance in an incredibly brief space of time. As they rounded the bend just beside the mill-pond and saw the whole scene spread out before them, their eyes were immediately fastened on a stirring picture close by.

Two little colored girls were running up and down the shore doing most of the screaming, and acting as though half frightened to death. The reason for their alarm was not hard to see, for at some little distance out from the bank a small boy, as black as the ace of spades, was having a terrible time trying to keep his footing on a plank that had been a part of a rude raft, doubtless fashioned by his own hands.

He had wished to "show-off" before his little playmates, and after rudely fastening several boards taken from the tumble-down old mill into a crude attempt at a raft, had boldly launched the same. With a pole he had stepped aboard, and then proceeded to "cut capers." Encouraged by the admiration of the other children, he must have become more and more reckless, so that he soon reached a point far enough distant from land to prevent him from touching bottom with his pole.

This sudden discovery may have alarmed him, and in his endeavor to paddle, he had caused his raft to part in sections. So there he was now clinging to one plank, and in immediate danger of falling into the water, which out there was doubtless many times over his head.

"Keep steady, there, boy!" shouted Thad. "Stick to your plank, and we'll get you ashore all right! Don't be scared, whatever you do! Thad, how can we reach him?"

"There's an old boat pulled up on the shore a little ways above here," said the other quickly, for he had the faculty of thinking of everything when an emergency arose, an admirable trait in any boy.

So they started on a run, heading for the spot, and hoping the tragedy would hold off until they could launch the old craft, which leaked more or less, but was likely to hold long enough for them to accomplish the rescue.

Passing the two small girls, Thad shot out words of encouragement to them.

"Stop that screaming!" he told them, with an air of authority. "You only rattle the boy, don't you know? We're going after a boat so as to get out to him. It's close by, and much safer than swimming. Tell him to keep still, and we'll get him in a jiffy!"

Of course he did not slacken his pace any while jerking out these words. They at least seemed to have some effect on the two children, for they stopped shrieking.

Just as the boys reached the boat, however, the cries broke out again with redoubled energy. Thad glanced back, and immediately exclaimed:

"He's fallen in, Hugh! We've got to hurry, you know!"

"Here's one of the paddles; do you see anything of the other?" demanded Hugh.

Luckily Thad discovered it immediately. The "paddles" were crude affairs chopped out of boards by some of the boys who used the boat while swimming; but all the same they answered a purpose.

With a rush the old boat was pushed down the sloping sandy shore and into the mill-pond. Hugh and Thad sprang aboard and each snatching up a paddle, they commenced to urge the unwieldy craft along as best they might.

As they worked, they could see what was going on ahead of them. The little chap evidently had considerable pluck about him, for he was making a really gallant fight for his life, trying to cling to the board, which was wobbling about in the water at a great rate. Twice his frantic hold seemed lost, but on each occasion he managed to regain it. Nature urges every human being or animal to struggle to the utmost when threatened with death by drowning. Some boys have even discovered that they could swim when they had to, or go down; though it is a risky experiment which should never be resorted to.

Hugh's heart seemed to be almost in his throat

as he watched the struggles of the poor little chap. Black or white, it made not the least difference to him just then; that child's life was as precious in his mother's sight as if he were the pink and white darling of a wealthy family.

Nearer they came to the scene. Oh! if only he might manage somehow to retain his grip just twenty seconds longer, they would be on hand, and ready to drag him over the side of the old boat to safety. Hugh, deep down in his heart prayed that it might be so. He also figured how he would plunge overboard at the last second, if necessary, and dive after the sinking child, for he must be saved.

They both worked as never before in their lives. Possibly that old boat swept through the water of the mill-pond at a faster rate than it had ever indulged in, even with twice the number of paddlers aboard. A precious human life was at stake, and this fact brought out every atom of energy those two gallant lads could summon to the fore.

Fortune was kind, and the plucky little colored boy continued to show wonderful tenacity of purpose; for he managed to retain his slipping grip on the turning plank until Hugh could bend over and take a grip of his kinky wool. It may not have been the most pleasant way to effect a rescue, but there was no time for being particular.

While he thus held the child above water, Thad bent down and got hold of the boy's arms. That settled it, for they speedily hauled him aboard.

The two little girl companions of the rescued child, whose admiration for his boldness had undoubtedly been the main cause for his taking such great risks, stopped screaming when they saw that he was safe in the boat.

The boys now made for the shore, as the boat was taking in water very fast, and already their feet were soaking wet. Besides, the sooner they reached land the better, because the boy had fainted from excess of fright, and also on account of the desperate endeavor he had made to keep from sinking.

A minute later and Hugh lifted him from the boat.

"We've got to get a fire started right away, Thad!" he exclaimed. "The air isn't as warm as it might be, and he'll be shivering soon. Besides, it's a long walk to town. Later on perhaps we may be able to stop some car or vehicle going in on the road, and take them all home. Here's my match-safe, so speed up a blaze, please."

It was fortunate that Hugh always made it a practice to have matches with him. There could be no telling when they might come in very handy, as on the present occasion; for there was no house near by at which they could seek assistance.

Thad was always a good hand at making a fire, and he quickly found plenty of fine tinder which flashed up when a match was applied. Then more wood was carefully placed on the little blaze, until in a brief time he had a cheery fire roaring.

Hugh laid the boy down where he could feel the comfortable heat. He understood that the child could not have swallowed any water to speak of, because he managed to keep his head above the surface, save in the very end of his struggle. It was only a swoon or faint, and likely the child would come out of it quickly. He rubbed the little hands, and waited to see signs of returning animation.

Two minutes afterwards the boy's eyes opened. He looked puzzled to see Hugh bending over him, and to hear the crackling of the fire.

"It's all right, my boy," said Hugh, encouragingly; "you fell into the water after your raft went to pieces, and we pulled you out. Now we mean to dry your clothes by the aid of this nice fire, and after that we'll see you get home. Here are your little playmates, you see. You can thank them for screaming, because only for that we might not have come up in time."

The boy allowed his hand to run up and down his other wet sleeve.

"Dem's my Sunday-best clo's, too. Mebbe mommy she won't whale me fo' gettin' dem all soaked like this," he muttered to himself disconsolately.

"Don't you worry about that," chuckled Thad, who had overheard the childish complaint. "Your mother, whoever she may be, will be so thankful that she hasn't lost her boy she'll forgive you anything. And you're a brave little chap in the bargain, because you did put up a nervy fight for your life, that's certain."

They succeeded in drying his clothes, and then, as a large car was seen coming along the road with only a single man in the same, Hugh ran over to hail the driver and beg him to take them all into town.

Luck favored them again. The man in the big car turned out to be Major McGrew's chauffeur, whom Hugh knew to speak to, as he was a baseball enthusiast of the first water. When he heard what had happened, he told Hugh to fetch the boy along; and also the two other kids; he'd have them home in a jiffy, for it was less than a mile to town.

The colored people, as so often happens, lived in a certain section of Scranton, being very clannish in their habits. Hugh did not doubt but that he could easily learn just where the boy lived. He looked at him several times trying to remember where he could have seen the little fellow before, because there seemed to be something familiar about his face; but somehow he failed to connect him with any family he knew.

When presently they entered the district where the colored folks had their homes, their coming created quite a flutter. To have a fine big car fetching a trio of colored children home was an event of importance.

Boys and girls, and a sprinkling of older persons as well, hurried to ascertain what it could mean. Doubtless they were quick to sense the fact that something out of the common run must have occurred to cause such a happening.

Hugh recognized an old man he knew as a

preacher, and addressing himself to this person he hastened to explain.

"These children were up at the old mill-pond, and the boy had made a raft on which he was having the time of his life, when the thing separated, and left him clinging to one plank where the water was quite deep. We chanced to hear the girls' screams and got to the spot in time to push out in an old boat and get hold of him just as he was sinking. He's a plucky little chap, I want to tell you. Only for the way he held on to that plank, he must have drowned before we could reach him. We dried his clothes at a fire we made, and have brought him home. I wish you would send for his mother, and tell her not to punish him. He's been very close to death, and has had a lesson he'll never forget."

The old man took a look at the boy.

"Why, it's sure enough little Brutus!" he exclaimed, as though just discovering this fact, for the boy had kept his face partly hidden, through shame and fear; then turning to some of the wide-eyed youngsters clustering around, the parson went on to say; "Here, you Adolphus Smith, run like the wind over to Madame Pangborn's and tell Sarah her boy needs her, because he's been in the pond; but be sure to let her know Brutus is all right!"

The boy shot away like a flash, while Hugh turned and looked at Brutus again; for now he knew that he had seen him over at the Pangborn mansion.

CHAPTER XVII

LITTLE BRUTUS AND HIS "COLLECTION"

It was not long before they discovered a woman running like mad toward the spot. Of course this was no other than Sarah, whose heart had been chilled by the news fetched by Adolphus Smith, the truth being considerably garbled, it is to be feared.

She arrived panting, and with her eyes full of horror, as though she fully expected to find her darling Brutus lying there all wet and cold.

Upon discovering the shrinking little form, she seized him in her arms, and dropping to the ground began rocking back and forth as she hugged him tight, meanwhile covering his ebony little face with motherly kisses.

"Hebben be praised, I ain't done lost my Brutus after all. Dat 'Dolphus he skeered me nigh to death wif his stuttering story as how my chile be'n in de mill-pond. What's all dis row about, anyhow? I hopes none o' you folks done play a joke on me, dat's right. It'd be de wustest thing yuh eber done, let me tells yuh."

The parson thereupon proceeded to tell her the real facts. Sarah hugged the rescued boy some more, and then on hearing how his life had been

saved by the actions of two white boys, she looked up at Hugh and Thad.

"Why, it am de young Morgan boy, glory, if it ain't!" she ejaculated, and Hugh was a little afraid the good woman, in her gratitude, might want to transfer her embraces from Brutus to him, so he held out his hand, with one of his smiles, saying:

"We were only too glad to be on the spot and give the boy a helping hand, Sarah. I didn't know at the time he was your child, though that wouldn't have made any difference. We dried his clothes at a fire we made, and he's all right."

Sarah, even as she squeezed Hugh's hand, was looking at Brutus out of the tail of her eye, as though an awful thought had just then burst upon her.

"An' he hab on his bestest Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes, too. I done hopes dey ain't shrunk on him, so he cain't git in 'em agin. Dat clerk he nebber guarantee dat dey wouldn't creep up if de boy he done falls in de pond. But how did it happen, I'd like to know."

Hugh thereupon took it upon himself to explain just how Brutus in trying to "show-off" before his little girl companions had ventured out too far, and managed to cause his raft to go to pieces. Sarah looked threatening, so Hugh hastened to "pour oil on troubled waters."

"Brutus has suffered enough for punishment, I should think, Sarah," he told her. "He's had his

lesson, and will never try anything like that again. You should be thankful it's no worse. Besides, let me tell you, he's a little hero. He fought like everything to save himself, and never let out so much as a cry. The girls did all the yelling. You ought to be proud of his grit."

"That's right, you had, Sarah," added Thad, thinking it his duty to "put in an oar" so as to save Brutus from the "smacking" he seemed to be dreading.

This sort of talk mollified the mother. She even looked proudly around at the clustering neighbors, for by now every denizen of Darktown had apparently been drawn to the spot, all wild to hear what had happened. Her look was in the shape of a challenge. It seemed to say: "Dere now, what do yuh good-for-nothin' coons think of my Brutus, after hearin' dese white boys say as how he's a real hero? Don't any ob yuh ebber ag'in ask me why I gives him dat name. Guess I knows my history, an' didn't I see it in him when he was a little baby? Dar ain't another hero in dis whole place, dat's right!"

She turned to Hugh again. Brutus took advantage of his opportunity to creep over to another woman, who also petted him, and who the boys afterwards learned was his aunt, a washerwoman of the town.

"Dat boy he ain't like de rest of de kids, I wants yuh to know, Marse Morgan," she was saying, eagerly. "All de boys 'round heah dey spends dere

time aplayin' in de street, or agittin' into trouble. My Brutus he's different. Jest yuh come wif me an' see how he done play all by hisself. I'd like yuh to know he ain't a wuthless little rascal, dat chile."

Hugh seemed about to beg Sarah to let them off, but Thad, for some reason, perhaps just through mere curiosity, hastened to say:

"Come on, let's take a peek, Hugh. I've got an engagement in a short time, but this'll only take a few minutes. We're some interested in Brutus, you know. I guess he's bound to make a name for himself some day."

So they followed Sarah as she led the way to a nearby cottage.

"Dat's whar we libs, me an' Brutus and my sister, Nancy, her as takes in washin' six days in de week, an' teaches de infant class in Sunday school on de seventh day. Yuh see we done got a cabin in de rear where Nancy she washes. So we fits up one end fo' Brutus' playhouse, same as de white chillun dey hab playhouses in de yard. He sets dar most ob de day a havin' de time o' his life playin' sojer with de buttons, and settin' out his Noah's Ark animals. I allers knowed dat boy was different from de rest o' de kids. Parson Brown, he say he sure enough hab de makin' o' a good preacher in him, fo' he talks by de hour to his toys."

So Hugh and Thad had a look-in. They found everything in order, showing that Nancy was not

slovenly about her work. The tubs were hung on the wall, and a basket of soiled clothes standing ready for the next day's washing.

Over at the far end of the cabin was the special precinct devoted to Brutus and his toys. Hugh glanced at the accumulation. He saw that the boy was one of those who love to accumulate things. He had numerous little assortments of curious articles, picked up here and there, all of which had excited his love for collecting.

Thad was heard to chuckle as though he found it quite amusing; but he turned this off with a cough as Sarah glanced inquiringly toward him.

"Yuh see how dat boy he spend his time," the proud mother went on to say. "Right here he play and play de whole blessed day long. He ain't nebber done tired o' talkin' to his toys, and asettin' o' 'em in lines like dey was in school. I always hab an idea in my head Brutus, he either make a good parson or else he bound to be a school teacher, I ain't zactly made up my mind yet which it'll be."

"It's plain to be seen, Sarah," said Hugh, as he turned away, "that your boy is different. I certainly hope he'll grow up to be a man you'll be proud of. You won't punish him for what happened today, will you? We promised him we'd ask you to go easy with him; he was dreadfully alarmed about his clothes, and seemed to think more about them than that his life had been in deadly peril."

"Bless yuh, honey, I ain't meanin' to do the leastest thing to dat sweet chile. Clothes kin be boughten agin, but I never'd be able to git anudder Brutus. But if he goes out to dat drefful mill-pond agin, I'm feared I'll have to skin him, and dat's a fact."

So the two chums strolled on, heading for another part of the town. Both of them had been highly edified by what they saw and heard in the colored settlement.

"I'd like to ask you one thing, though, Thad; what were you chuckling at while we were in that cabin that shares the honors of a wash-house with Brutus and his wonderful collection of toys?"

"Oh! something struck me as funny, that's all, Hugh. The fact is, just when Sarah was prophesying all those wonderful things that might be in store for Brutus, from being a great soldier, or an eloquent parson who could frighten people into repenting of their sins, I took stock of all that junk the boy's gone and collected, and do you know, I was thinking that the chances were he'd make a successful hustler in the 'rags, old iron, old clothes' line, when he grew up."

Hugh also laughed on hearing that.

"Nobody can tell," he went on to say. "The veil of the future hides such things from our mortal eyes, as Dominie Pettigrew said the other Sunday. Brutus may turn out to be a wonder; and again there's a chance of his being only an ordinary day laborer."

"Well, if he keeps on taking risks just to show off before the girls," observed Thad, drily, "I rather guess he won't grow up at all, but die young. But I'll leave you here, Hugh, as I have a date with some one for half-past four this afternoon."

"Oh! is that so?" chuckled the other; "well, go along, and don't bother making excuses. I wouldn't have you break an appointment with Ivy for anything."

"You're away off this time, Hugh, for it happens that it isn't Ivy Middleton, or any other slip of a girl," Thad hastened to say.

He did not offer to explain, and the other thought he looked somewhat mysterious; but while his curiosity may have been slightly aroused, Hugh did not feel justified in making any further inquiries. If Thad did not wish to tell him, it was all right; even between chums there may be little secrets.

"I may see you later on, though," Thad added, as he was turning away; "that is, if I'm successful in my errand."

Which remark further aroused the wonder of his comrade, who could not imagine what Thad had in mind. Hugh went home, and picking up a book he was reading, proceeded to renew his interest in the story. Half an hour slipped away in this fashion. Then he heard a jolly whistle down on the street, which he knew full well. Sure enough, it was Thad coming hurriedly toward the Morgan home.

He discovered Hugh at the window and waved his hand. Even at that distance Hugh saw his face was flushed, just as his manner was buoyant.

"Now I wonder what that boy has been up to," Hugh said to himself, as he awaited the coming of Thad; but cudgel his brain as he might, Hugh never once suspected the errand of his chum could have anything to do with the solving of the puzzle that was assuming all the characteristics of a heavy burden on his, Hugh's, shoulders.

Thad presently burst in upon him, for he knew the way to Hugh's den, and thought nothing of going in and out of the Morgan house as though he belonged there. Hugh motioned to a chair.

"Sit down and cool off," he told Thad. "You look all heated up, as if you'd been running fast."

"Well, so I have, part of the way," gasped the other; "and it's quite some distance out to the Rookery, you must remember."

"What's that?" exclaimed Hugh; "do you mean to say your appointment was with Owen Dugdale after all?"

"Shucks! no, but with his old grandfather," snickered Thad. "Owen's gone off for the afternoon with Mr. Leonard in the athletic instructor's flivver, and paying a visit to Barton. I knew about that when I called Mr. Dugdale up around noon today, for he has a telephone, it happens, and told him I'd accept his invitation to drop in again to chat with him, and would be over by about four. Well, in the language of Alexander,

or some other old worthy of ancient times, it was *veni, vidi, vici* with me; I came, I saw, I conquered! What do you think of that, Hugh?"

With the words he suddenly drew something from a pocket and held it in front of his companion's nose. It was a souvenir spoon, one of unique pattern, Hugh saw, and he had a thrill as he comprehended just what it might mean.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRAIGHT DRIVE FOR THE TRUTH

"So, you stole Owen's spoon, did you?" Hugh said, reprovingly.

Thad made a gesture as though he thought his chum was putting it hard.

"I simply borrowed it, that's all, Hugh," he hastened to explain. "Of course I haven't any use for souvenir spoons, or any other kind of spoons, either, for that matter. I was tired of all this beating around the bush, and made a straight drive to find out the truth. Either that boy is innocent, or else he's guilty, and now we can learn which it is."

"What do you plan to do, now you have the spoon?" demanded Hugh.

"Why," explained Thad, "I thought perhaps you'd agree to take me over to call on Madame Pangborn, even if it is Sunday. The better the day the better the deed; and our main object would be to solve the horrible mystery that's been hanging over poor Owen's head all this while, even if he doesn't know about it. What do you say to that, Hugh?"

The other boy seemed to consider, while Thad watched his face eagerly. It was just like Thad

to go directly at the heart of the matter, for his was rather an impetuous nature. After all, perhaps it might be the easiest way in which to settle the question. Hugh at least would be glad to lay his burden down, for it had been an uphill fight all the way. Besides, there was so much need of his being able to pay full attention to baseball matters, with the first game only six days off, that he would welcome any means for winding up his self-appointed task.

"Well, it might be best to drop in on the old lady and have her identify that spoon as one of her set," he finally observed. "Once that fact was established, we would have some solid foundation to build on. As it is now, we're just groping in the dark."

"Then you agree, do you, Hugh?"

"Call it a bargain, Thad. I'll take you around to call on the old lady. She's a nice soul, and will be glad to see us. In fact, when we were talking about a number of things the last time I was in her house, and I chanced to mention your name, she asked me to fetch you around sometime. Of course she knows who you are, but I guess you've never really met her. She's a wonderful old woman, and heart and soul bent on getting all sorts of comforts for the wounded soldiers of her beloved la belle France."

Thad looked greatly pleased.

"Then let's be starting out right away," he suggested. "It might be, Owen would get home before

he expected to, and I'd a heap sooner he wasn't around when we were on our way to the Pangborn house. Somehow, I'd hate to look the boy in the face after doing what I did; though you understand it was done in the hope of clearing up this awful puzzle."

"No need of saying that, Thad, because I know what your feelings are. My plan would have been to pick up the spoon incidentally, and admire it. Then it would be easy to tell from the manner of Mr. Dugdale whether he knew where it came from. I don't suppose you thought to do anything like that, now?"

"Why, no," came the reply; "for you see, I'd laid out my plan of campaign, and wanted to hew close to the line. The quickest way to settle the whole matter, according to my calculations, was to just show the old lady the spoon, and ask her if it was one of the missing ones. But please get a move on you, Hugh. I'm fairly quivering with suspense, because I somehow feel that we're on the verge of making a big discovery."

"Perhaps we are," his chum told him, without any show of elation, "but if it convicts Owen Dugdale of this thing, I'll be mighty sorry."

He led the way downstairs, and secured his cap from the rack. Then the two lads hurried out of the front door, heading in the direction of the big house where the old French lady lived, and which had lately been turned into a sort of general headquarters for the Red Cross workers. There some

of the ladies of Scranton could be found day after day, sewing and packing such garments as had been brought in, so that they might be sent across the sea to the country where the brave poilus were in the trenches defending their native land against the aggressor, and slowly but surely pressing the Teutonic hosts back toward the border.

"I'm going to ask you a favor, Hugh," remarked Thad, presently, as they drew near their intended destination.

"Go ahead and ask it, then," he was told.

"Let me run this little game, won't you, please—that is, I mean, allow me to introduce the subject of souvenir spoons, and then show the old lady the one I've got in my pocket right now?"

"That seems only fair," Hugh assured him. "Since you've taken it on yourself to crib that spoon from Owen's den, it's up to you to do the honors. I'll only be too glad to have you do most of the talking. Yes, and about the time you flash that thing in front of her eyes I'll be shivering for fear we learn the worst."

"Nothing like heroic treatment when you've got a cancer gnawing at your vitals, as surgeons all say," remarked Thad, rather pompously. "I'm aiming at the bull's-eye now, you understand. It's going to win or lose, and no more tom-foolery about it."

When Hugh rang the door-bell, it was Sarah who answered, showing that she had not lingered very long at home after the boys left, but had re-

turned to her duties with the madame, who doubtless paid extravagant wages for her services.

She smiled broadly at sight of them.

"I sure is glad to see yuh agin, bofe ob yous," she said. "I done tells de missus all 'bout hit, and she says as how it was on'y what she'd spect of dat young Mistah Morgan."

"Thank you for telling me that, Sarah," Hugh went on to say; "it's pleasant to know some one thinks well of you. Is Mrs. Pangborn at leisure? I hope she isn't taking a nap just now?"

"Deedy she ain't dat, suh; she's on'y readin' in de library. An' she be mighty glad tuh see yous bofe."

So she led the way along the wide hall, to usher the boys into the commodious library. Bookcases lined the walls, and it seemed to be an ideal place, where a student might enjoy himself very much indeed. Just then, however, there were several sewing machines shoved aside, and much evidence to the effect that on weekdays this same library might be a beehive of industry, with women chattering as they sewed.

The old lady looked surprised at seeing them, but the welcoming smile and the extended hand were evidence that she was not displeased.

"I've taken the liberty of fetching my chum, Thad Stevens, around to see you, Mrs. Pangborn," Hugh was saying as he sat down. "You've heard me talk of him more than a few times; and even expressed the wish that I might introduce him to

you. He's interested in nearly everything that concerns me, and we seem to work together like a well-ordered team, even if we do have an occasional little spat, which is to be expected."

Madame Pangborn loved boys, as has been said before. She understood them wonderfully well, too, considering that she had never had one of her own. So she laughed at what Hugh said.

"I'm doubly glad you have dropped in to see me today, Hugh," she told him, "for more reasons than one. In the first place, I want to hear at first hand just what did happen out there at that terrible mill-pond; and how you managed to save that little boy of my Sarah from drowning. He sometimes comes here with her to spend a part of a day, and I like to talk with him, he seems so original, so bright, and so curious about everything I possess, too."

"Oh! it didn't amount to very much, so far as we were concerned, I mean," Hugh expostulated; "but since Sarah has told you about it, I suppose I might as well spin the whole story. We consider that we were lucky to be around, that's all, for I guess little Brutus would have been with the angels before now if we hadn't happened along, and heard all that shrieking from the colored children."

Then he went on to tell about it, even to what had happened after Brutus arrived home in the big car, the object of attention in Darktown, with Sarah running like mad to find out what the gar-

bled account brought by Adolphus Smith might really mean.

The old lady was highly interested in the story, which really Hugh managed to tell quite cleverly, even injecting some humor in his narrative.

"So that is how Sarah comes to be calling her Brutus a hero, is it?" Mrs. Pangborn went on to say, with a smile. "I had never heard her say such a word before, and considered it rather queer in a mother whose child had been close to drowning. According to my mind, you and your chum are really the ones most deserving of that title; but I'll spare your blushes, young men. Now tell me what you are doing in the line of outdoor sports; because I hear there are great goings on around this section of country; and I suppose I must give up next Saturday afternoon to journeying over to Belleville, in order to encourage our valiant Scranton High boys."

Both of them started telling of the things that were being done in a baseball way; and as they were enthusiasts, they found it easy to enlarge upon such a favorite theme. Thad, however, had begun to show signs of nervousness, and Hugh suddenly remembering that they had come there with a particular motive in view, drew out of the conversation, leaving it to his chum to carry it on with the old lady.

Thad only waited for a favorable opening, when he was ready to "sail in." This came when the Madame chanced to mention her travels in many

lands, and the fond memories she had of all her visits.

"But when I shall eventually return to my beloved France," she remarked sadly, "I anticipate many a heartache to see the terrible condition of the fair country that has been turned into a howling wilderness by the vandal German armies. Ah! I almost dread the day, much as I yearn to tread my native soil again."

"My chum was telling me that you had quite a collection of queer souvenir spoons," Thad remarked just then, thinking he had found just such an opening as he wished.

Madame Pangborn shot Hugh a suggestive look, as if wondering how far he had confided in his chum.

"Yes, it is true, I have taken considerable pleasure collecting spoons in some of the many cities I visited, all of them wonderfully unique," she went on to say, with a sigh; "but perhaps, after all, it is a useless and pernicious habit, since it may tempt some weak one, and cause trouble."

Then Thad brought out what he had in his pocket. Hugh held his breath.

"Please take a look at this spoon, will you, Mrs. Pangborn," said Thad, "and tell me if you have ever seen one like it before!"

She gave the speaker a quick, suspicious look, and eagerly took the little object. For a minute or so she turned it over and over, while the two boys were quivering with suspense. Then she spoke.

"Ah! quite a charming specimen of Old English silver workmanship, and I must say it is exceedingly handsome; but it represents a city in which I never happened to set foot," with which she handed the spoon back to Thad, who almost dropped it to the floor, such was his sudden sensation of intense relief.

CHAPTER XIX

HUGH REACHES HIS GOAL

Thad Stevens looked as though any one could knock him down with a feather. The astonishing fact that the old lady who made a fad of collecting souvenir spoons, had failed to recognize the one which he had purloined from Owen's den "struck him all in a heap," as he afterwards expressed it. Why, that would seem to indicate Owen must be entirely innocent, so far as proof went.

Hugh, on his part, was quicker to recover. Although he felt a spasm of sincere satisfaction pass through him at the result of his chum's test, at the same time he realized that there was no necessity for making "mountains out of molehills."

Madame Pangborn had instantly surmised that there was more connected with that odd little silver spoon than she had as yet grasped. Indeed, having good eyesight, she could hardly have failed to notice the strange actions of Thad.

"Tell me what it all means, please, Thad," she besought him; "for I am certain you must have some deeper motive in fetching that souvenir spoon to show me than appears on the surface. Don't you think I am entitled to your full confidence?"

"Indeed you are," said Hugh, quickly, "and you shall hear the whole story. Both of us are right now tingling with satisfaction and delight because our worst fears have proved ungrounded."

Then he went on to explain just how Thad had by accident become a temporary guest under the roof of the Rookery, after having helped old Mr. Dugdale to the house when he was seized with a sudden attack of sciatica in one of his lower limbs. It did not take Hugh, with an occasional sentence of explanation from his eager chum, who wanted to be set right in the eyes of the good madame, long to tell how Thad chanced to discover the spoon among many other things in Owen's "den," and what a host of fears its presence there had aroused in their breasts.

Then he reached the point in his narrative where Thad conceived the bold idea of appropriating the spoon during Owen's absence, and letting the old lady see the same, knowing full well that if she recognized it as one of her missing souvenir mementoes, the case would look exceedingly dark for Owen.

Madame Pangborn's face took on a radiant look after she had learned all.

"I have never been able to believe that boy could be guilty of such an atrocious deed," she hastened to say, emphatically. "I flatter myself that I can read boys as well as any one, and in his eyes there lies only truth, and an ardent desire to accomplish great things that have long been burning in

his soul. But, nevertheless, the circumstantial evidence was so strong that it has caused me some sleepless nights. Now I know Owen is innocent, I shall be satisfied. I would sooner lose all my spoons ten times over than find that he had yielded to a sudden and irresistible temptation."

"But," said Thad, in sore perplexity, "the three spoons are gone, there's no doubt about that; and if Owen didn't take them who did?"

"Please let the matter drop," expostulated the old lady, hastily. "I am satisfied to know the boy is innocent. I shall immediately put the rest of my spoons away, so that they may not tempt any one again."

"But it wouldn't be right to give the hunt up so easily as that, you know, lady," complained Thad. "We've started in to find the thief, and our motto is never to turn back once we've put our hands to the plough. Hugh, don't you say the same?"

"I certainly do," affirmed the other boy. "And while about it, perhaps I ought to tell Mrs. Pangborn how I at one time even began to imagine the thief was a thing of green and yellow feathers, and a hooked bill, otherwise known as Pretty Polly."

At that, the old lady seemed highly interested.

"Oh! such a thought never occurred to me, Hugh!" she hastily exclaimed. "Could it be possible, do you think?" and she glanced apprehensively toward the corner of the library, where the

handsome and intelligent parrot sat on her perch, chained by the leg, and with her yellow-crowned head turned on one side as though she might be listening to all that was being said.

"It is a bare possibility," Hugh went on to say. "A whole lot would depend on whether Polly chanced to get free during those particular days when the spoons disappeared. As to whether a bird like that would carry away such things, and hide them, there's lots of accounts of such things happening. I'll tell you of a few instances I've read about, and every one was vouched for as absolutely true in the bargain."

So for some little time he amused and interested the old lady with accounts of strange things various species of pet birds, from rooks and ravens, all the way to talking parrots, had been guilty, in the way of stealing bright articles of jewelry, and trinkets that seemed to have caught their fancy, hiding them away in some cranny or nook, where the whole collection was afterwards found.

"I may have read something along those lines myself at some time or other, Hugh," she told him, as he concluded, "but it slipped my mind. Whether Polly is guilty of petty larceny or not, after this, I shall be more careful than ever about keeping her fast to her perch by that long chain. There is no telling what a wise old bird of her nature might not attempt, given freedom. I sometimes think she has a little devil in her, when she says something wonderful, and looks so droll.

But you have given me a very happy half hour, for which I thank you both."

Thad kept glancing toward Hugh as though he was puzzled as to what further action his chum meant to take in the case. For accustomed to reading the expression on Hugh's face, he seemed to realize that the other had some "card up his sleeve" which he meant to play.

"Hadn't we better be going, Hugh?" he now asked.

"Right away," came the reply, "for it's getting near six o'clock, and Mrs. Pangborn will be having her tea soon."

"I do have it a little earlier on Sunday, because I allow Sarah to go home," admitted the old lady. "She is a great hand to attend church, you know, and I believe sings in the choir like a lark. I often hear her practicing down in the kitchen while cooking dinner. But I'd be delighted if you boys could stay and take a bite with me."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Hugh, "another time we'd be only too glad to accept your invitation; but I must be home tonight. What time do you suppose Sarah would be at her house? I want to see her about her little shaver Brutus, and find out if his ducking did him any harm, and thought I'd walk around later in the evening."

"You are apt to find Sarah at home up to a quarter of eight. After that she will be in her place in the colored church," he was told.

Then the boys took their leave. On the way

home, Thad expressed some curiosity concerning the visit Hugh proposed making to Sarah's home.

"Do you really think that boy might come down with pneumonia, or something like that on account of being in the water, Hugh?" he asked, at which the other smiled mysteriously and replied:

"Oh! the water is still pretty chilly, you know, Thad; and the child was so terribly frightened that he might feel the result of his immersion, even if we did make a fire, and dry his clothes well. Besides, I've dropped my pocket knife, and I've a little idea it was while we looked through that playhouse of Brutus'. But suppose you stop asking questions, and agree to accompany me when I make my little call on Sarah this evening?"

"Oh! all right, Hugh, I'll go with you," complained Thad, "but I know as well as anything you've got some queer notion back of it all, which you don't mean to share with me. But remember that Madame Pangborn told you she would trust Sarah with her purse or her life, she has such confidence in the woman."

"I haven't forgotten," said Hugh, quietly. "I know what I'm doing. You show up around seven or a quarter after, and we'll take a little walk. Perhaps we might pick up a few facts worth while before we come back; stranger things have happened than that, Thad."

"You are the limit," laughed the other, as he swung aside and headed for his own house, doubtless to ponder over the mysterious words of Hugh

many times while eating his supper on that Sunday evening.

It was just dark as he started across lots toward Hugh's home; for there was a short-cut which they frequently made use of—trust boys for cutting off corners whenever it is possible, even if they have to vault fences in order to reduce distances.

All the way out to the colored settlement, Hugh kept up an unusually lively flow of talk. He knew Thad was fairly itching to ask questions, and apparently Hugh did not mean to let him have a chance.

So they finally entered among the humble cottages and cabins where Scranton's colored population lived. Children were running about the streets shouting in play, even as the first peal of the cracked bell in the little church near by began to sound.

Sarah was at home. She seemed surprised to see the two white boys.

"How's little Brutus, Sarah?" asked Hugh.

"Oh! he's all hunky-dory, suh, 'deed an' he is," she replied with a smile. "I done jest gib him his supper, and chucked de chile in his bed. An' I ain't put a hand on him neither. Jes' as yuh sez he done hab a lesson; but I tells him if he ebber goes to dat ere mill-pond agin I lays fo' him, and makes him smart like fun."

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Sarah, but I've dropped my knife somewhere, and remembered

having taken it out of my pocket when you were showing us Brutus' playhouse. Would you mind getting a lamp, and going back there just to take a look around. I value that knife a lot, and would hate to lose it. We won't keep you from church more than a few minutes at most."

"Sure I will, suh. I'd do a thousand times as much fo' de white boys as sabed my baby fo' me dis berry day."

She quickly secured a lamp, and led the way back in the yard. Thad was beginning to show signs of nervousness. He realized that Hugh must be playing some sort of a game, and yet strange to say he was unable to fathom it.

Arriving at the old cabin used partly as a wash-house, and with the rear devoted to Brutus' "playthings," they entered. Sarah held the lamp while Hugh started to scan the floor earnestly, moving around as he looked.

All at once he stooped and picked something up.

"Well, I was right in believing I dropped my knife in here, for you see, I've found it again. Why, what's this?"

He bent over again, and from a receptacle in a queer old fragment of a desk that had a number of pigeon-holes in it, Hugh plucked something and held it before the eyes of the others. Then he made another movement, and *three* shining objects lay there in his hand.

Thad gasped and stared. He was looking on the missing souvenir spoons! As for the amazed

Sarah, it was a blessing that she did not let the lamp fall from her nerveless hand as she burst forth with:

"Fo' de lands sake, if dem ain't some ob de old missis' spoons; dat good-fo'-nothin' brack imp must a' snuck one ebbery time I takes him to visit de lady. Oh! he kotch it fo' dis, you better belieb me!"

CHAPTER XX

LOOKING FORWARD—CONCLUSION

THERE could be no doubt about the genuine nature of the horror and indignation, as well as shame, that struggled for the mastery in the mind of the astonished colored woman. To learn that her little boy had abused her confidence whenever she took him visiting her good mistress was a shocking revelation. She also looked furiously angry, and it was evident that the said Brutus would receive due punishment on account of his propensity for purloining things that belonged to others, just to add to his "collection." The thing that struck Hugh as bordering on the comical was that even a small colored boy might have the same mania for gathering "trophies" of his visits that possessed Madame Pangborn. He felt that the good lady would herself be amused at the coincidence, and be ready to forgive little Brutus.

He proceeded to show Sarah that it would be entirely unnecessary to let any one know what had happened. There would be no exposure, and she need not be "disgraced" in the eyes of her neighbors. Hugh would simply return the spoons to their owner, who certainly would never hold it against Sarah. But after that, should Brutus be

invited to the old lady's house, his actions would be carefully watched lest his acquisitive propensities again get the better of his honesty.

Thad was highly delighted with the result of their "raid" on Brutus' playhouse. On the way to Madame Pangborn's, he boldly accused his chum of having set up a little game.

"Now I wouldn't be at all surprised, Hugh," he went on to say, "if you dropped your knife in that cabin on purpose when we were looking around this afternoon; own up and tell me if that isn't true."

"Yes, I did," admitted the other, laughingly. "Now that the thing has turned out even better than I dared hope, I'm willing to confess that a sudden suspicion gripped me about that time. When I saw what an astonishing assortment of old junk that boy had collected, I knew he had a mania for picking up things. And the idea struck me that since he sometimes was allowed to stay for an afternoon with his mother at Madame Pangborn's house, what if the temptation came to him to take one of those pretty spoons to add to his assortment? Why, the more I thought of the idea the stronger it hit me. On the impulse of the moment I dropped my knife, so as to have a good excuse for getting out there again, and prowling around a bit. I didn't want to mention a thing even to you until I had proved whether there was any truth in my new suspicion. And it turned out splendidly."

"Oh! I'm so glad, for Owen's sake particularly!" declared Thad. "Now I must manage to get this spoon back in his den without his ever suspecting I took it; but that ought to be easy. I hope he never knows he was under suspicion, because he's very proud, and it would hurt him terribly."

"What makes me think a near-miracle has been performed," added Hugh, soberly, "is the way all this came about. Only for our taking that walk we wouldn't have been near Hobson's mill-pond at just the minute little Brutus was struggling in the water, and so been able to pull him out. That in turn took us to his home; and his mother had to dip in by wanting us to see how her precious pickaninny played with his toys back in the old cabin. It's wonderful, that's all I can say."

"But, Hugh, you deserve all the credit," affirmed Thad. "In the first place, you took this heavy task on your shoulders, and started to find out who was guilty of robbing your good old friend, Madame Pangborn. It's been an uphill fight from the start, but here we've reached the finish in a blaze of glory. But won't the old lady be astonished when we show her the spoons, and tell her just how they were found."

She certainly was, and made them go into the most particular details concerning the matter. Just as wise Hugh had believed would be the case, she did not blame Sarah in the least; nor did she declare the little chap would surely grow up to be a disgrace to his mother. Her kindly heart

knew the failings of small boys better than to condemn a child for a weakness. She did say she would have a good talk with Sarah, and advise her as to how she should try to train Brutus so that this very trait might serve to his credit instead of being always a weakness.

"And as for Owen," she concluded, "I am more than ever satisfied that his is a sterling character. I want to see more of that boy; and I'm determined to make the acquaintance of his grandfather. I feel absolutely certain that the old gentleman has been misunderstood by thoughtless people in Scranton; and from little hints Owen has dropped, I fully believe it will turn out that Mr. Dugdale is a man of some consequence, perhaps even renown, in his own country; though just why he left it, and has been living in retirement here these two years, is a matter that concerns only himself. But you boys have acquitted yourselves handsomely in this affair, and brought me much happiness. Come and see me often; you will always find my latch-string out to Hugh Morgan and Thad Stevens."

So they went home with hearts that beat high in the exuberance of their joy. The puzzling enigma had been fully solved, and just as they would have wished it to come out. Now Hugh could put all other matters aside and devote his spare time to his work as field captain of the newly organized Scranton High Baseball Team.

Only a few days remained before their first

grand game would be played with the Belleville nine, and well they knew that they must acquit themselves handsomely on the diamond if they hoped to bring a victory home with them, and to cause Scranton, so long drowsing in a Rip Van Winkle sleep, to awaken and whoop for joy.

Other problems would possibly present themselves to Hugh Morgan for solution from time to time, as he pursued his onward way; but it can be set down as certain that a lad of his sagacity and determination was bound to attain his goal, once he started out.

And with that ambitious programme of outdoor sports ahead of them, it can be safely assumed there would be glorious doings in and around the town of Scranton, starting on the following Saturday, when, packing their kits, and donning their new uniforms, the high-school team set out to invade the lair of the tiger in neighboring Belleville. Just what they accomplished in the good old summer time will be found narrated between the covers of the next volume in this series of books, now on sale under the suggestive title of "The Chums of Scranton High in the Three-Town League; or, Out for a Baseball Pennant."

THE END